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LETTERS

TO A

PHILOSOPHICAL UNBELIEVER.

PART I.

CONTAINING

An Examination of the principal Objections to the Doctrines of *Natural Religion*, and especially those contained in the Writings of Mr. HUME.

THE SECOND EDITION.

By JOSEPH PRIESTLEY, LL.D. F.R.S.

AC. IMP. PETROP. R. PARIS. HOLM. TAURIN. AUREL. MED. PARIS. HARLEM. CANTAB. AMERIC. ET PHILAD. SOCIUS.

SCILICET HAUD SATIS EST RIVOS SPECTARE FLUENTES——
FONTEM IPSUM SPECTARE JUVAT.

ANTI LUCRETIUS.

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24/8/

BIRMINGHAM,
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MDCCLXXXVII.

TO

WILLIAM TAYLEUR, Esq.

OF SHREWSBURY.

DEAR SIR,

I Shall think myſelf highly honoured, if, in dedicating this work to you, I can perpetuate the memory of our friendſhip, and at the ſame time procure for revealed religion the advantage that it may derive from the knowledge of your zealous attachment to it.

We live in an age in which many perſons of a philoſophical turn of mind are diſpoſed to reject revelation. This you and I equally lament. But we conſider it as a temporary circumſtance, ſince the

principles of true philoſophy lead to the moſt ſatisfactory concluſion in favour of it; and therefore we doubt not but that, in due time, the juſtneſs of the concluſion will be apparent to all who give ſufficient attention to the ſubject.

It is, we are ſenſible, either a miſunderſtanding of the nature and object of revealed religion (ariſing from the manifold corruptions and abuſes of it) or an inattention to the nature of its evidence, that is the cauſe of the preſent unbelief. But when theſe corruptions and abuſes ſhall be clearly traced to their ſource, and this ſource ſhall appear to be ſomething quite foreign to the genuine principles of this religion; and when the evidence of the facts, on which the truth of it depends, ſhall appear to reſt on the very ſame found-

ation

ation with all our *faith in hiſtory*, nothing will be wanting to the complete ſatisfaction of the truly philoſophical and the candid.

In the mean time, it is, no doubt, to be lamented, that ſo many of thoſe perſons who are joined with us in the inveſtigation of natural phenomena, who, together with ourſelves, receive ſo much pleaſure from the diſcovery of the laws to which they are ſubject, ſhould be ſo far disjoined from us, when we begin to look a little farther into the ſame glorious ſyſtem; that they ſhould attend with rapture to the voice of nature, and not raiſe their thoughts beyond this, to the author of nature. It gives us equal concern, that others ſhould acknowledge the voice of God in his works, and yet turn a deaf ear when the ſame great Being condeſcends to diſplay his power,

and to ſignify his will, in a ſtill more direct and emphatical manner, and reſpecting things of infinitely more moment to us than any thing that can engage our attention here.

We are concerned to perceive that every thing that is the object of our ſenſes, and that relates to this life, ſhould be ſo highly prized by them; and yet that they ſhould ſhew a perfect indifference with reſpect to the continuance of life, in a future and better ſtate, in which we ſhall have an infinitely wider field of enquiry, and which we ſhall enter upon with the advantage of all the experience that we have acquired in the methods of inveſtigation here.

But this circumſtance has ariſen from influences which we truſt are daily diminiſhing. True philoſophy neceſſarily inſpires

ſpires the greateſt veneration for the conſtitution and laws of nature. It therefore leads to devotion, and conſequently to the practice of all virtue. And when the pious philoſopher ſhall be convinced that there is nothing *irrational* in that religion which alone teaches the great doctrine of *a future life*, he will, at leaſt with that candour, and that cool and diſpaſſionate temper, which accompanies him in all his other enquiries, attend to the evidences of it. And when he ſhall find that he is ſo far from being required, on his approaching the province of revelation, to depart from thoſe *rules of philoſophizing* which have the ſanction of all our experience, that the purſuit of them neceſſarily carries him into it (ſo that he muſt even ceaſe to be a philoſopher, if he refuſe to be a chriſtian) he will rejoice in the union of

two ſuch characters, and will continue his reſearches with double ſatisfaction; confident that whatever may be begun and left imperfect here, will be reſumed and completed hereafter; that nature, and the author of nature, will be for ever the delightful objects of his veneration, and furniſh an inexhauſtible ſource of employment, and of happineſs.

We are ignorant, indeed, of the particulars of our condition in a future ſtate (and the wiſdom of divine providence is conſpicuous in this our ignorance) but we may aſſure ourſelves that, continuing to be a part of the ſame great ſyſtem, of which the preſent ſtate is only the commencement, and under the government of the ſame great and good Being, we ſhall be poſſeſſed of whatever ſhall be requiſite for

our

our own happineſs, and of the means of promoting the happineſs of others.

You, Sir, have always been happy in your attachment to mathematical and philoſophical ſtudies, but more ſo in your juſt preference of theological ones. Theſe employ, and brighten, the evening of your life, as they did that of the great Newton, whoſe example, if it were neceſſary, would alone be a ſufficient juſtification of us, in uniting two purſuits which are too often conſidered as the reverſe of each other. You, therefore, naturally join with me in wiſhing to recommend to others thoſe ſtudies which give ſo much ſatisfaction to ourſelves.

Your attachment to the cauſe of genuine chriſtianity was conſpicuous in your relinquiſhing

quiſhing a trinitarian form of worſhip, and adopting an unitarian one, in your own family, till you had procured it a more public and permanent eſtabliſhment. Fortitude in ſuch a cauſe as this, while the world in general is too ready to acquieſce in every thing that has the countenance of *faſhion* and of *power*, is truly worthy of a chriſtian philoſopher; and ſuch an example as you have ſet cannot be too generally known, being ſo rare, and therefore ſo much wanted. The great Newton, though an unitarian, had not the courage to declare himſelf, and act as one.

Notwithſtanding the preſent general averſion to theological enquiries, among perſons engaged in philoſophical purſuits, we are by no means ſingular in our reſpect for them; and ſuch examples as yours, when

ſufficiently known, muſt contribute to make us ſtill leſs ſo. With the view of accelerating ſo deſirable an event was this work compoſed; and ſhould it, in the ſmalleſt degree, be the means of accompliſhing ſo great an end, it will give me more ſatisfaction than any other of my publications.

With the greateſt reſpect, I am,

Dear Sir,

Your moſt obliged humble ſervant,

J. PRIESTLEY.

BIRMINGHAM,
FEB. 1, 1787.

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THE

PREFACE

TO

PART I.

IT will, I think, be acknowledged by all perſons who are capable of reflection, and who *do* reflect, that, in the whole compaſs of ſpeculation, there are no queſtions more intereſting to all men than thoſe which are the ſubject of theſe *Letters*, viz. Whether the world we inhabit, and ourſelves who inhabit it, had an intelligent and benevolent author, or no proper author at all? Whether our conduct be inſpected, and we are under a righteous government, or under no government at all? And, laſtly, whether we have ſomething to hope and fear beyond the grave, or are at liberty to adopt the Epicurean maxim, *Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die?* This may ſtrike us more forceably if we

attend a little to the principles of human nature.

The great superiority of man over brutes consists in the greater *comprehensiveness of his mind*, by means of which he is, as it is commonly expressed, capable of *reflection*, but, more accurately speaking, capable of contemplating, and, therefore, of enjoying, the *past* and the *future*, as well as the *present*. And, what is most extraordinary and interesting to us, this power, as far as appears, has no limits.

In infancy we feel nothing but what affects us for the moment; but *present feelings* bear a less and less proportion to the general mass of sensation, as it may be called, consisting of various elements, the greatest part of which are borrowed from the *past* and the *future*; so that, in our natural progress in intellectual improvement, all temporary affections, whether of a pleasurable or of a painful nature, will come at length to be wholly inconsiderable; and we shall have, in a greater

a greater degree than we can at preſent conceive, an equable enjoyment of the whole of what we *have been*, and *have felt*, and alſo of what we have a confident *expectation of being*, and of feeling, in future.

Our progreſs, however, in this intellectual improvement is capable of being accelerated, or retarded, according as we accuſtom ourſelves to reflection, or live without it. For certainly, though, while we retain the faculties of memory and reaſoning, we cannot, whether we chuſe it or not, wholly exclude reflection on the paſt, or anticipation of the future (and, therefore, ſome kind of advance in intellectual improvement, is unavoidable to all beings poſſeſſed of intellect) yet it is in our power to exclude what is of great moment, viz. all that is *voluntary* in the buſineſs; ſo that being, in a great meaſure, deaf to what is behind, and blind to what is before, we may give ourſelves up to mere ſenſual gratifications, and, conſequently, no queſtion concerning what is *paſt*, or *future*, may intereſt us. In this ſtate of mind a

man may think it abſurd to trouble himſelf either about how he came into the world, or how he is to go out of it.

It would be too haſty, however, to aſſert, that it can only be in this very loweſt ſtate of intellect, a life of mere ſenſation, or very imperfect reflection, that any perſon can be unconcerned about the belief of a God, and the doctrines of natural religion. For a man may get above mere ſenſual indulgence, and give great ſcope to his intellectual faculties with reſpect to ſome objects, and be wholly inattentive to others. And it is in the power of little things, by wholly occupying the mind, not only to exclude the conſideration of greater things, but even the idea of their being greater.

This, indeed, comes within the deſcription of a kind of proper *inſanity*; but then it may be juſtly aſſerted, that, in a greater or leſs degree, all perſons who do not prize every thing according to its real value, and regulate their purſuits accordingly, are inſane;

ſane; though, when the degree is ſmall, it paſſes unnoticed, and when the conſequences are inconſiderable, it is far from being offenſive. Nay, in ſome caſes, the world derives great and manifeſt advantage from a partial diſorder, as it may be called, of this kind. For great excellence in particular arts and ſciences is perhaps ſeldom attained without it. Indeed, it cannot be expected, that a man ſhould greatly excel in ſome things without neglecting, and, conſequently, undervaluing others.

We are ſhocked at a man's inſanity only when it makes him inattentive to things that immediately concern him, as to the neceſſary means of his ſubſiſtence or ſupport, ſo that he muſt periſh without the care of others. But when the intereſt, though real, is *remote*, a man's inattention to it paſſes unnoticed. By this means it is that, without being ſurpriſed, or ſhocked, we every day ſee thouſands, who profeſs to believe in a future world, live and die without making any

proviſion for it; though their conduct is much more inexcuſable than that of the atheiſt, who, not believing in futurity, minds only what is preſent.

But though the conduct of the atheiſt be conſiſtent with itſelf, it muſt give concern to thoſe who are not atheiſts, and who have a juſt ſenſe of the importance of the belief of a God, of a providence, and of a future ſtate, to the preſent dignity, and the future happineſs of men.

An atheiſt may be temperate, good-natured, honeſt, and, in the common, and leſs extended ſenſe of the word, a *virtuous* man; becauſe, if he be a man of good underſtanding, of naturally moderate paſſions, and have been properly educated, the influences to which he will have been expoſed may be ſufficient to *form* thoſe valuable and amiable habits, and to *fix* him in them. But, notwithſtanding this, an atheiſt has neither the *motive*, nor the *means*, of being what he

he might have been, if he had not been an atheiſt.

An atheiſt cannot have that ſenſe of *perſonal dignity* and *importance* that a theiſt has. For he who believes that he was introduced into life without any deſign, and is ſoon to be for ever excluded from life, cannot ſuppoſe that he has any very important part to act in life; and, therefore, he can have no motive to give much attention to his conduct in it. The paſt and the future being of leſs conſequence to him, he will naturally endeavour to think about them as little as poſſible, and make the moſt of what is before him. But the neceſſary conſequence of this is the *debaſement of his nature*, or a foregoing of the advantages that he might have derived from that power of comprehenſion, which will have full ſcope in the theiſt; the man who conſiders himſelf as a link in an immenſely connected chain of being, as acting a part in a *drama*, which commenced from eternity, and extends to

eternity; who conſiders that every gratification, and every action, contributes to form a *character*, the importance of which to him is, literally ſpeaking, infinite; who conſiders himſelf as ſtanding in the neareſt and moſt deſirable relation to a being of infinite power, wiſdom, and goodneſs; a being who gives unremitted attention to him, who plans for him, and conducts him through this life, who does not loſe ſight of him even in the grave, and who will, in due time, raiſe him to a life, which, with reſpect both to gratifications and purſuits, will be of unſpeakably more value to him than the preſent, and whoſe views with reſpect to him and the univerſe are boundleſs.

A man who really believes this, and who gives that *attention* to it which its great importance to him manifeſtly requires, muſt be *another kind of being* than an atheiſt, and certainly a being of unſpeakably greater dignity and value. His *feelings* and his *conduct* cannot but be greatly ſuperior.

This,

This, however, from the nature of the thing, muſt depend upon the *attention* that a theiſt gives to his principles, and to the ſituation in which he believes himſelf to be placed. And, therefore, it is very poſſible that a merely *nominal believer* in a God may be a *practical atheiſt*, and worſe than a mere ſpeculative one, living as *without God in the world*, intirely thoughtleſs of his being, perfections, and providence. But ſtill, nothing but *reflection* is wanting to reclaim ſuch a perſon, and recover him to a proper dignity of ſentiment, and propriety of conduct; whereas an atheiſt thus ſunk has not the ſame *power of recovery*. He wants both the *diſpoſition* and the neceſſary *means*. His mind is deſtitute of the *latent ſeeds* of future greatneſs.

If, according to the obſervation of Lord Bacon, it be *knowledge* that conſtitutes *power*: if it be our knowledge of the external world that gives us ſuch extenſive power over *it*, and adds to our happineſs in it, knowledge

ſo

ſo materially reſpecting ourſelves, our general ſituation, and conduct, muſt have great power over *ourſelves*. It muſt, as it were, new make us, and give us ſentiments and principles greatly ſuperior to any that we could otherwiſe be poſſeſſed of, and add to our *happineſs* as much as it does to our *dignity*.

If, as Mr. Hume obſerves, in his *Eſſay on the Natural Hiſtory of Religion*, p. 114, "the "*good*, the *great*, the *ſublime*, and the *raviſh*-"*ing*, be found evidently in the genuine "principles of theiſm," I need not ſay that there muſt be ſomething *mean*, *abject*, and *debaſing*, in the principles of atheiſm. If, as he alſo ſays, p. 116, a people intirely devoid of religion are ſure to be but "a few degrees "removed from brutes," they muſt be this, or ſomething worſe than this, who, having been acquainted with the principles of religion, have diſcarded them. The conſiſtency of theſe ſentiments with thoſe advanced in other parts of Mr. Hume's writings, it is not my buſineſs to look to.

I ſhall

I ſhall think myſelf happy if, in theſe *Letters*, I have advanced any thing that may tend either to leſſen the number of ſpeculative atheiſts, or, which is no leſs wanting, convert nominal believers into practical ones. It is not, in general, *reaſon* and *argument*, but the pleaſures and buſtle of the world that prevent both; and proper moderation in our deſires and purſuits, accompanied with ſerious reflection, would be of the greateſt uſe in both caſes. I wiſh to give occaſion, and to furniſh the means, for this cool recollection of ourſelves.

It is the too eager purſuit of pleaſure, wealth, ambition, and I may add of the arts, and even of ſcience (theological ſcience itſelf not wholly excepted) that is our ſnare. All theſe may equally *occupy the mind*, to the excluſion of the greater views that open to us as *men*, and ſubjects of moral government; who are but in the infancy of an endleſs, and, therefore, an infinitely important exiſtence. All theſe purſuits are equally capable of confining

fining our attention to what is immediately before us, and of hiding from our view whatever in the paſt, or the future, moſt nearly concerns us to attend to.

The great *book of nature* is always open before us, and our eyes are always open upon it; but we paſs our time in a kind of *reverie*, or abſence of thought, inattentive to the moſt obvious connexions and conſequences of things. The ſame is the caſe with the *book of revelation*. But it is the former only that I have a view to in the preſent publication.

My deſign, however, is to proceed to conſider the ſpeculative difficulties which attend the doctrines of *revelation*, with philoſophical and thinking perſons in the preſent age, if the reception of this part ſhall give me ſufficient encouragement to proceed farther. But if I ſucceed in this firſt part, I ſhall conſider my great object as nearly attained; there being, as I have reaſon to think, many more

more atheists at present, than mere unbelievers in revelation, especially out of England; and, for my part, I cannot help considering the difficulties that attend the proof of the Jewish and christian revelations, as not greater than those which relate to the doctrines of natural religion.

Whenever, therefore, I shall hear of the conversion of a speculative atheist to *serious deism* (an event which has never yet come to my knowledge) I shall have little doubt of his soon becoming a serious christian. As, on the other hand, the same turn of mind that makes a man an unbeliever in christianity has, in fact, generally carried men on to a proper atheism. But, in both cases, this progress in speculation requires some degree of *attention* to the subject; for, with a total *listlessness and unconcern*, a man may rest *any where*. He may understand the first book of Euclid, and have no knowledge of the second, and therefore, no opinion about any of the propositions in it.

In both parts of this work it is my wiſh to ſpeak to *the preſent ſtate of things*, and to conſider the difficulties that really preſs the moſt, without diſcuſſing every thing belonging to the ſubject; for which I muſt refer to more ſyſtematic writers, and for a ſhort view of the whole chain of argument, with ſome original illuſtrations, to my *Inſtitutes of natural and revealed Religion*.

In ſome reſpects, I may, perhaps, flatter myſelf that I write with more advantage than any of thoſe who have preceded me in the ſame argument, as I ſhall particularly endeavour to avail myſelf of the real ſervice that infidelity has been of to chriſtianity, in freeing it from many things which, I believe, all who have formally undertaken the defence of it have conſidered as belonging to it; when they have, in reality, been things quite foreign to it, and in ſome caſes ſubverſive of it. I ſhall hope, therefore, to exhibit a view of chriſtianity to which a *philoſopher* cannot have ſo much to object, every thing that I

ſhall

ſhall contend for, appearing to me perfectly conſonant to the principles of ſound philoſophy; and I ſhall uſe no other *modes of reaſoning* than thoſe that are univerſally adopted in ſimilar caſes, as I hope to make appear. Whether I ſucceed to my wiſh or not, I ſhall be *ingenuous*, and as impartial as I can. As to any bias that I may lie under, thoſe who know me, and my ſituation, are the beſt judges; it being impoſſible I ſhould be aware of this myſelf. Whatever cauſe we ourſelves wiſh well to, we neceſſarily imagine we have ſufficient reaſon for ſo wiſhing.

I am far from meaning to hold myſelf forth as an oracle in this buſineſs; but I ſhall be really obliged to any perſon who ſhall propoſe to me any objection that he really thinks materially to affect the credibility of the Jewiſh or the Chriſtian ſyſtem. No objection ſo propoſed to me ſhall paſs unnoticed, whether I be able to give ſatisfaction with reſpect to it, or not. If I myſelf feel the difficulty, I ſhall freely acknowledge it, and endeavour to eſtimate the force of it.

I, to-

I, together with the perſons to whom I am addreſſing myſelf, am a ſpeculative inhabitant of the earth, actuated by the ſame paſſions, engaged in a variety of the ſame purſuits, and (as we have not yet made any diſcovery that will enable us to cure the diſeaſe of *old age*, and to prolong life *ad libitum*) I, together with them, am haſtening to the grave; and therefore I am equally intereſted with them to find whether any thing awaits us after death, and, if any thing, what it is. This is, in its own nature, a more important object of enquiry than any thing that we have hitherto ſo laboriouſly inveſtigated. It behoves us, therefore, to be cool and patient, attentive to every circumſtance that can throw light upon the great queſtion, and to give one another all the aſſiſtance we can with reſpect to it.

Truth, and the *laws of nature*, are our common object; but we are neceſſarily more *intereſted* in the inveſtigation, in proportion to the *magnitude* of the object, and the *concern* we have in it. In theſe queſtions, therefore

fore, there is a concurrence of every thing that can render the inveſtigation intereſting to us; and as there is no interference of *particular intereſts* in the caſe, there is all the reaſon imaginable to lay aſide every prejudice, to unite our labours, and give one another all the aſſiſtance in our power, either by *propoſing difficulties*, or *ſolving* them. Aſſiſtance, in either of theſe forms, I ſincerely intreat, and ſhall be truly thankful for.

With reſpect to this publication, concerning *natural religion*, it may not be improper to obſerve, as I did in my *Inſtitutes of Natural and Revealed Religion*, vol. I. p. 3. "that, "in giving a delineation of natural religion, "I ſhall deliver what I ſuppoſe *might* have "been known concerning God, our duty, "and our future expectations, by the light of "nature, and not what was *actually* known "of them by any of the human race: for "theſe are very different things. Many "things are in their own nature attainable, "which, in fact, are never attained; ſo that

" though we find but little of the knowledge " of God, and of his providence, in many " nations, which never enjoyed the light of " revelation, it does not follow, that nature " did not contain, and teach thoſe leſſons, " and that men had not the means of learn- " ing them, provided they had made the " moſt of the light they had, and of the " powers that were given them."

" I ſhall, therefore, include, under the " head of *natural religion*, all that can be " *demonſtrated*, or proved to be true, by na- " tural reaſon, though it was never, in fact, " diſcovered by it; and even though it be " probable, that mankind would never have " known it without the aſſiſtance of reve- " lation."

Mr. Hume acknowledges, that the hypotheſis which would moſt naturally occur to uninſtructed mankind, to account for appearances in the world, would be that of *a multiplicity of deities*; and of what mankind,

who

who have been, as far as appears, altogether, or nearly self-taught, in this respect, have been capable, in many hundred, and, in some cases, probably, thousands of years, we have evidence enough. The experiment, as we may call it, has been tried both among the civilized and the uncivilized of our race.

Nothing, therefore, that I have advanced in this work, can be at all understood to lessen the great value of revelation, even admitting, what is far from being probable, that, in some very distant age of the world, men might have attained to a full persuasion concerning all the great truths of religion, as the unity of God, the doctrine of a resurrection to immortal life, and a state of future retribution. What the most enlightened of our race had conjectured concerning these things, in fact, led them rather farther from the truth, than nearer to it, and never made much impression on the generality of mankind.

Plain as the great argument contained in these *letters* is, viz. that which establishes the belief of *a God*, and a *benevolent providence*, I have not been able to reply to the objections that have been started on the subject, in such a manner as that I can promise myself will be perfectly intelligible to *all* my readers. But, in general, those persons, who cannot fully comprehend the answers, will not be able to see the force of the objections; and therefore, if they have no doubts themselves, and have no occasion to make themselves so far masters of the argument, as to enable them to satisfy the doubts of others, they may very well content themselves with entirely omitting, or giving but little attention to the third, fourth, twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth Letters.

I give this notice, lest persons not used to metaphysical speculations, looking into those particular Letters, and finding unexpected difficulties in the subject of them, should hastily conclude, that the whole is a business

of

of *ſubtle diſputation*, with reſpect to which, they could never hope to attain to any ſatisfactory determination; and therefore, that they may as well leave it to be diſcuſſed by idle and ſpeculative people, without concerning themſelves about it. Whereas, nothing can be more momentous in itſelf, or more important to be known, and *attended to*, than the general doctrine of theſe Letters; and it equally concerns the wiſe and the ignorant, men of ſpeculation or men of buſineſs, thoſe who are capable of the greateſt refinement, and thoſe who cannot refine at all. For how different ſoever our turns of thinking, or modes of life, may be, we are all equally ſubjects of God's moral government, if there be a God, and a governor, and equally *heirs of immortality*, if there be any immortality for man.

Some may conſider the critical review of Mr. Hume's metaphyſical writings, in the laſt of theſe Letters, as ungenerous, now that he is dead, and unable to make any

reply. But this circumſtance makes no difference in his particular caſe, as it was a maxim with him (and perhaps one inſtance of the great *wiſdom* that Dr. Smith aſcribes to him) to take no notice of any objections to his writings; and he has left behind him a guardian of his reputation, of ability, in my opinion, fully equal to his own, and whoſe friendſhip for him cannot be queſtioned.

I think it proper to obſerve in this place, that there is an inaccuracy in p. 398 of my *correſpondence with Dr. Price*. There I ſay that "the reaſon, or account, of the exiſtence "of the *Divine Being*, cannot be the ſame "with that of the exiſtence of *ſpace*, or *du*-"*ration*." Whereas, I ſhould have ſaid,

that

that "though there may be the ſame ne-
"ceſſity for the exiſtence of the deity, and
"for that of ſpace, or duration, we are not
"able to *ſee* it." And what I immediately ſubjoin, as a reaſon for the aſſertion, will better apply to this more accurate ſtate of the caſe, viz. "I can, in any caſe, form an
"idea of the non-exiſtence both of all
"*effects*, and of all *cauſes*; and conſequently
"both of the *creation*, and of the *creator*,
"and of the non-exiſtence of the latter, juſt
"as eaſily as of that of the former; but
"ſtill the ideas of *ſpace* and *duration* re-
"main in the mind, and cannot be excluded
"from it." This correction will be found neceſſary to prevent an inconſiſtency between the aſſertion, as it now ſtands, and what is advanced on the ſame ſubject in this treatiſe.

It is alſo proper to give notice, that the edition of Mr. Hume's *Philoſophical Eſſays*, that I have quoted, is *the ſecond*, of 1751, 12mo; and that of his *Four Diſſertations*

is *the first* of 1757. My edition of the *Systeme de la Nature* is in two volumes, dated Londres, 1771. The first volume contains 397 pages, and the second 500.

LETTERS

LETTERS

TO A

PHILOSOPHICAL UNBELIEVER.

LETTER I.

Of the NATURE *of* EVIDENCE.

DEAR SIR,

I Am ſorry to find that, in conſequence of the books you have lately read, and of the company you have been obliged to keep, eſpecially on your travels, you have found your mind unhinged with reſpect to the firſt principles of religion, natural as well as revealed. You wiſh me to attempt the ſolution of the difficulties you have propoſed to me on thoſe ſubjects; and I ſhall, without much reluctance, undertake to give you all the ſatisfaction that I am able.

You

You have not, that I know, any vicious bias to miſlead you, by ſecretly inclining you to diſbelieve a ſyſtem which threatens vice with future puniſhment. And, though it is always flattering to a perſon of a ſpeculative turn to be ranked with thoſe whoſe mode of thinking is the moſt *faſhionable*, being connected with ideas of liberality, courage, manlineſs, freedom from vulgar prejudices, &c. yet as you have not particularly diſtinguiſhed yourſelf in this line, either by writing, taking the lead in converſation, or in any other way, I flatter myſelf that your bias of this kind (though it will draw you more ſtrongly than you can be aware of yourſelf) may not be too ſtrong for rational evidence, or ſuch as the nature of the thing admits of.

Otherwiſe, you are not ſo little read in the world, as not to have perceived, that there are many prejudices which no *evidence* can overcome. No perſon can poſſibly be ſenſible of this in himſelf, but we all ſee it in others; and we ſee that it extends to ſubjects

jects of all kinds, theology, metaphyſics, politics, and common life. Theſe prejudices ariſe from what are commonly called *falſe views of things*, or improper aſſociations of ideas, which in the extreme becomes *delirium*, or *madneſs*, and is conſpicuous to every perſon, except to him who actually labours under this diſorder of mind.

Now, as the cauſes of the wrong aſſociations of ideas affect men of letters as well as other perſons (though generally in a different way, and perhaps not, upon the whole, in the ſame degree) they may have the ſame bias to incredulity in ſome caſes, that others have to credulity; and the ſame perſon, who is the moſt unreaſonably incredulous in ſome things, may be as unreaſonably credulous, and even ſuperſtitious, in others; ſo little ought we to take it for granted, that a man who thinks rationally on ſome ſubjects will do ſo uniformly, and may be confided in as a ſafe guide in all. This, however, is agreeable to other analogies, as with reſpect to courage; for the extreme of bravery in ſome

reſpects

reſpects is often found united with the extreme of cowardice in others.

5. You know a friend of ours, by no means deficient in point of general underſtanding, who to the faſhionable infidelity adds the faſhionable follies of the age. Though he believes nothing of *inviſible powers* of any kind, he has a predilection for a certain claſs of numbers in the lottery, and, when he is eagerly engaged in gaming, muſt throw his dice in particular, and what we think whimſical, circumſtances. Now, what is this better than *whiſtling for a wind* (which, however, we find many ſenſible ſailors continue to practice) the *Roman auguries*, or the weakeſt of the Popiſh ſuperſtitions?

6. The fact is, that in ſome manner, which perhaps neither himſelf nor any other perſon can explain, he has connected in his mind the idea of ſome peculiar circumſtances with that of a ſucceſsful throw, and the idea of other peculiar circumſtances with that of an unſucceſsful one, juſt as we happen to connect in our minds the ideas of *darkneſs* and of

apparitions; which association, when it is once formed, often affects the mind more or less through life, and long after all belief in apparitions is given up, and even ridiculed.

7. I might enforce this observation, which is far from being foreign to our present purpose, by reminding you, that there are both able and upright men on both sides of what we think the clearest of all questions, in morals, theology, and politics. How often have you expressed your astonishment, that any person should hold the doctrine that you reprobate concerning the *Middlesex election*, and the *taxation of America*, and yet think himself the friend of liberty, and the enemy of all oppression and tyranny.

8. Had not mortality come in aid of the demonstrations on which the Newtonian system of the universe is founded, it is not certain that it would even yet have supplanted the Aristotelian, or Cartesian system, ill-founded as they were. But the old and incorrigibly bigotted abettors of former hypotheses leaving the stage, reason had a better chance with the younger, and the less biassed.

When

9. When you reflect on these, and many other facts of the same nature, you will not wonder much, that so many sensible men of your acquaintance, and men of an ingenuous and candid disposition in other respects, struck with the glaring absurdities and mischiefs of superstition, should think it wise and right to take refuge in irreligion; and, not seeing where they can consistently stop, even disclaim the belief of a God. Nor do I wonder that, being men of ingenuity, their reasonings on these subjects should have staggered you. All this may be the case, and yet those reasonings be altogether inconclusive.

10. As you profess you have no objection to my considering you as ignorant as I please in every thing relating to this subject, I shall, in order to lay the surest foundation of a truly rational faith, take the liberty to begin with explaining what appears to me to be the natural ground of *evidence*, or of the *assent* that we give to propositions of all kinds, that we may see afterwards how far it may be applied to the subject of religion.

Now

" Now every *propoſition*, or every thing to which we give our aſſent, or diſſent, conſiſts ultimately of two terms, one of which is affirmed of the other; as that *twice two is four*, the *three angles of every right-lined triangle are equal to two right angles*; *man is mortal*, *air is elaſtic*, &c. And the ground of our affirming one of theſe ideas of the other is either that, when they are conſidered, they appear to be, in fact, the ſame idea, or perfectly to coincide; or elſe that the one is conſtantly obſerved to accompany the other. Thus the reaſon why I affirm that *twice two is four*, is, that the idea, annexed to the term *twice two*, coincides with the idea annexed to the term *four*; ſo does the idea of the quantity annexed to the *three angles of a right-lined triangle* with that of *two right angles*. But the reaſon why I affirm that *man is mortal* is of a different nature, and is founded on the obſervation that all men are found to be ſo; and I ſay that *air is elaſtic*, becauſe every ſubſtance that bears that denomination is found to reſtore itſelf to its former dimenſions, or nearly ſo, after having been compreſſed.

Propo-

Propoſitions of the former kind, if they be true at all, are univerſally and neceſſarily ſo, and the evidence for them is called *demonſtration*. Of this kind are the indiſputable propoſitions in geometry and algebra. But propoſitions of the latter kind are always liable to be corrected and modified by ſubſequent and more exact obſervations; becauſe it is not by comparing our own ideas only that we come to the knowledge of their truth, and later obſervations may correct what was defective in former ones.

3 There are, however, propoſitions of the former kind, the proof of which is not ſtrictly demonſtrative, becauſe the evidence of it does not ariſe from the compariſon of our ideas, but from the teſtimony of others, the validity of which reſts ultimately on the aſſociation of ideas; human teſtimony in certain circumſtances not having been found to deceive us. Of this kind is the propoſition *Alexander conquered Darius*. For the proof of it is complete, when it appears that the perſon, diſtinguiſhed by the name of Alexander, is the ſame with him that conquered

quered Darius. But ſince the evidence of this can never be made out by any operations on my own ideas, I have recourſe to the teſtimony of others; and I believe the propoſition to be true, becauſe I have all the reaſon I can have, to think that a hiſtory ſo authenticated as that of Alexander and Darius may be depended on.

14 Now it is not pretended, that the evidence of the propoſitions in natural or revealed religion is always of the former of theſe two kinds, but generally of the latter, or that which depends on the aſſociation of ideas; and in revealed religion, the evidence chiefly ariſes from teſtimony, but ſuch teſtimony as has never yet been found to deceive us. I do not therefore ſay, that I can properly *demonſtrate* all the principles of either; but I preſume that, if any perſon's mind be truly unprejudiced, I ſhall be able to lay before him ſuch evidence of both, as will determine his aſſent; and, in ſome of the caſes, his *perſuaſion* ſhall hardly be diſtinguiſhable, with reſpect to its *ſtrength*, from that which ariſes

from a demonſtration properly ſo called, the difference being, as mathematicians ſay, leſs than any aſſignable quantity. For no perſon, I preſume, has, in fact, any more doubt either of there having been ſuch a perſon as Alexander, or of his having conquered Darius, than he has of any propoſition whatever. And yet ſufficient and plenary as this evidence appears to me, it may fall far ſhort of producing conviction in the minds of all; for, in ſome caſes, we have ſeen that demonſtration itſelf will not do this.

I am,

Dear Sir,

Your's, &c.

LETTER

LETTER II.

Of the direct Evidence for the Belief of a God.

DEAR SIR,

HAVING premiſed the obſervations contained in the preceding letter on the nature of evidence, I proceed to obſerve, that no perſon can live long in the world without knowing that men make *chairs* and *tables*, build *houſes*, and write *books*, and that chairs, tables, houſes, or books, are not made without men. This conſtant, and indiſputable obſervation lays the foundation for ſuch an aſſociation of the ideas of chairs, tables, houſes, and books, with that of *men* as the makers of them, that whenever we ſee a chair, a table, a houſe, or a book, we entertain no doubt but, though we did not ſee *when* or *how* they were made, and nobody gives us any information on the ſubject, yet that ſome man or other *did* make them. No

man can ever ſuppoſe that a chair, a table, a houſe, or a book, was either the production of any tree, or came into being of itſelf. Nothing, in the courſe of his own experience, or that of others, can lead him to imagine any ſuch thing.

He afterwards ſees birds build neſts, ſpiders make webs, bees make honeycombs, &c. and accordingly he, as before, aſſociates in his mind the ideas of all theſe things with that of the animals that made them; and therefore he concludes, when he ſees a *honeycomb*, for inſtance, that *bees* have been at work upon it.

Finding, however, that ſome animals can, to a certain degree, imitate the works of others, and man thoſe of moſt of them, he ſees reaſon to limit his former concluſion, that ſuch a particular animal, and no other, muſt neceſſarily have produced them, but (generalizing his ideas, from obſerving ſomething of the ſame nature in whatever can produce the ſame thing, and calling it *ſimilar power*) he ſays, that ſome being of *ſufficient powers* has produced it.

4 Advancing, as he neceſſarily muſt, in the habit of generalizing his ideas, he calls chairs, tables, neſts, webs, &c. by the general term *effects*, and men, animals, &c. that produce them, by the term *cauſes*; and expreſſing the reſult of all his obſervations, he concludes univerſally, that *all effects have their adequate cauſes*. For he ſees nothing come into being in any other way.

5 He likewiſe ſees one plant proceed from another, and one animal from another, by natural vegetation, or generation, and therefore he concludes that every plant and every animal had its proper parents. But the parent plant, or parent animal, does not bear the ſame relation to its offſpring that men do to chairs, books, &c. becauſe they have no *deſign* in producing them, and no *comprehenſion* of the nature or uſe of what they produce. There is, however, ſome analogy in the two caſes; and therefore the parent plant, or parent animal, is ſtill termed a *cauſe*, though in a leſs proper ſenſe of the word. However, admitting theſe to be called cauſes, it is ſtill univerſally true, that

nothing begins to exist without a cause. To this rule we see no exception whatever, and therefore cannot possibly entertain a doubt with respect to it.

6. Again, wherever there are *proper causes*, as of *men* with respect to *chairs*, *books*, &c. we cannot but be sensible that these causes must be capable of comprehending the nature and uses of those productions of which they are the causes, and *so far* as they are the causes of them. A carpenter may know nothing of the texture of the wood on which he works, or the cause of its colour, &c. for with respect to *them* he is no cause; but being the proper cause of the conversion of the wood into a chair, or table, he (or the person who employed him, or who first constructed these things, &c.) must have had an adequate idea of their nature and uses.

7. Observations of this kind extending themselves every day, it necessarily becomes a maxim with us, that wherever there is a fitness or correspondence of one thing to another, there must have been a cause capable of comprehending, and of designing that

fitness,

fitneſs. The firſt model of a windmill could not have been made by an ideot. Of ſuch concluſions as theſe we have ſo full a perſuaſion, from conſtant experience and obſervation, that no man, let him pretend what he will, can entertain a ſerious doubt about the matter. The experience and obſervations of all men, without exception, are ſo much alike, that ſuch aſſociations of ideas as theſe muſt neceſſarily have been formed in all their minds, ſo that there is no poſſible cauſe of any difference of opinion on the ſubject.

Thus far we ſeem to tread upon firm ground, and every human being, I doubt not, will go along with me. And if they go thus far, I do not ſee how they can help going one ſtep farther, and acknowledge, that if a *table* or a *chair* muſt have had a deſigning cauſe, capable of comprehending their nature and uſes, the *wood*, or the *tree*, of which the table was made, and alſo the *man* that conſtructed it, muſt likewiſe have had a deſigning cauſe, and a cauſe, or author, capable of comprehending all the

powers and properties of which they are poſſeſſed, and therefore of an underſtanding greatly ſuperior to that of any man, who is very far, indeed, from comprehending his own frame; being obliged to ſtudy it, and make diſcoveries concerning it by degrees, as he does with reſpect to other things moſt foreign to himſelf, in the general ſyſtem of nature. And of the nature of the immediate *perceptive power* itſelf, it is no more poſſible that he ſhould have any idea, than that an eye ſhould ſee itſelf.

¶ This reaſoning, wherever it may lead us, I do not ſee how we can poſſibly refuſe to follow, becauſe it is exactly the ſame that we ſet out with, ariſing from our own *immediate experience*. No perſon will ſay that one table might make another, or that one man might make another. Nothing that man does approaches to it. And if no man now living could do this, neither could any man's father, or moſt remote anceſtor; becauſe we ſee no ſuch difference in any beings of the ſame ſpecies. Though, therefore, it ſhould even be allowed, that *the ſpecies* had no be-

ginning,

ginning, it would not follow that it could be *the cauſe of itſelf*, or that it had *no cauſe*; for the idea of a cauſe of any thing implies, not only ſomething prior to itſelf, or at leaſt cotemporary with itſelf, but ſomething capable at leaſt of comprehending what it produces; and our going back ever ſo far in the generations of men or animals brings us no nearer to the leaſt degree of ſatisfaction on the ſubject. After thinking in this train ever ſo long, we find we might juſt as well ſuppoſe that any individual man now living was the firſt, and without cauſe, as either any of his anceſtors, or *the ſpecies itſelf*. For that there is ſuch a contrivance in the ſtructure of a man's body, and eſpecially ſomething ſo wonderful in the faculties of his mind, as exceeds the comprehenſion of *man*, cannot be denied.

10 For the ſame reaſon that the human ſpecies muſt have had a deſigning cauſe, all the ſpecies of brute animals, and the *world* to which they belong, and with which they make but *one ſyſtem*, and indeed all the *viſible univerſe*,

univerſe (which, as far as we can judge, bears all the marks of being *one work*) muſt have had a cauſe, or author, poſſeſſed of what we may juſtly call *infinite power and intelligence*. For, in our endeavours to form an idea of ſomething actually infinite, we ſhall fall greatly ſhort of an idea of ſuch intelligence as muſt belong to the author of the ſyſtem.

It follows, therefore, from the moſt irreſiſtible evidence, that the world muſt have had a deſigning cauſe, diſtinct from, and ſuperior to itſelf. This concluſion follows from the ſtrongeſt analogies poſſible. It reſts on our own conſtant experience; and we may juſt as well ſay, that a *table* had not a deſigning cauſe, or no cauſe diſtinct from itſelf, as that the *world*, or the *univerſe*, conſidered as one ſyſtem, had none. This neceſſary cauſe we call *God*, whatever other attributes he be poſſeſſed of.

Whatever difficulties we may meet with as we proceed, *ſo far* we muſt go, if we advance even the firſt ſtep; and not to admit the firſt ſtep, that is, not to admit that ſuch a thing

a thing as a *table* had a prior and ſuperior cauſe, would be univerſally judged to proceed from ſome very uncommon diſorder in the mental faculties, and to be incompatible with a ſound ſtate of mind.

I ſhall, in my next, proceed to conſider the difficulties that have been ſtarted on this ſubject by metaphyſical writers; and whether I be able to do it to your ſatisfaction or not, I will, at leaſt, do it with all poſſible fairneſs. In the mean time,

I am, &c.

LETTER III.

OBJECTIONS CONSIDERED.

DEAR SIR,

HITHERTO we have met with nothing that deſerves to be called *a difficulty* in the proof of the being of a God; and if nothing more could be advanced on the ſubject,

it

it would, I think, juſtify us in refuſing to attend to any thing that could be ſaid by way of *objection*; becauſe ſo far we have what is fully equivalent to a *demonſtration* of the exiſtence of a primary intelligent cauſe. I ſhall now, however, proceed to the conſideration of the principal difficulties that have been ſtarted on the ſubject.

The firſt in importance is, that, for the ſame reaſon that the univerſe requires an intelligent cauſe, that intelligent cauſe muſt require a ſuperior intelligent cauſe, and ſo on *ad infinitum*, which is manifeſtly abſurd. We may juſt as well, therefore, it is alledged, acquieſce in ſaying, in the firſt inſtance, that the univerſe had no cauſe, as proceed to ſay that the cauſe of the univerſe had none.

I anſwer, that to acquieſce in ſaying that the univerſe had no cauſe is, for the reaſons that have been given already, abſolutely *impoſſible*, whatever be the conſequence. If, therefore, there be ever ſo little leſs difficulty on the other ſide of the dilemma, viz. that the cauſe of the univerſe had no cauſe, it is to that that we muſt incline.

Let

Let us see then whether there be any other supposition, which, though it be a *difficulty*, or *incomprehensible* by us, does not directly contradict our experience, or whether by some independent argument it may not be proved, that, incomprehensible as it is, there *must* have been an *uncaused intelligent being*.

Both these things have, in fact, been done before; but I shall here repeat them with illustrations, adapted to this particular difficulty; and, in order to this, I shall resume the argument in the following different manner.

6 Something must have existed from all eternity, for otherwise nothing could have existed at present. This is too evident to need illustration. But this *original Being*, as we may call it, could not have been such a thing as a table, an animal, or a man, or any Being *incapable of comprehending itself*, for such a one would require a prior, or superior, author. The original Being, therefore, must have had this prerogative, as well as have been necessarily *uncaused*.

It

It is not improper to call a Being incapable of comprehending itself *finite*, and a Being originally and neceſſarily capable of it *infinite*; for we can have no idea of any bounds to ſuch knowledge or power; and, uſing the words in this ſenſe, we may, perhaps, be authoriſed to ſay; that, though a finite Being muſt have a cauſe, an infinite one does not require it. Though it is acknowledged that theſe concluſions are above our comprehenſion, they are ſuch as, by the plaineſt and the moſt cogent train of reaſoning, we have been *compelled* into; and therefore, though, on account of the finiteneſs of our underſtanding, it may be ſaid to be *above* our reaſon, to comprehend *how* this original Being, and the cauſe of all other Beings, ſhould be himſelf uncauſed, it is a concluſion by no means properly *contrary* to reaſon. Indeed, what the univerſally eſtabliſhed mode of reaſoning, founded on our own immediate experience, obliges us to conclude, can never be ſaid to be contrary to reaſon, how *incomprehenſible* ſo ever it may be by our reaſon.

That

8 That there actually is an *uncauſed intelligent Being* is a neceſſary concluſion from what does actually exiſt; for a ſeries of finite cauſes cannot poſſibly be carried back *ad infinitum*, each being ſuppoſed capable of comprehending its own effects, but not itſelf. Since, therefore, an univerſe, bearing innumerable marks of moſt exquiſite deſign, *does exiſt*, and it would be abſurd to go back through an infinite ſucceſſion of finite cauſes, we *muſt* at laſt acquieſce in the idea of an uncauſed intelligent cauſe of this univerſe, and of all the intermediate finite cauſes, be they ever ſo many.

9 On this ſide there is only a *difficulty of conceiving*, but nothing *contrary to our experience*, and there is plainly no other choice left us. Our experience relates only to ſuch things as are incapable of comprehending themſelves, or finite, and therefore require a cauſe. Conſequently, though this experience furniſhes a ſufficient analogy for judging concerning all other things which have the *ſame property*, it by no means furniſhes any analogy by which to judge concerning what is totally

totally different from any thing to which our experience extends; things not finite, but infinite, not deſtitute of original ſelf-comprehenſion, but poſſeſſed of it. Here is ſo great a difference, that as the one muſt neceſſarily be *cauſed*, the other may be neceſſarily *uncauſed*.

10 Though nothing can properly help our conception in a caſe ſo much above the reach of our faculties, it may not be amiſs to have recourſe to any thing in the leaſt degree ſimilar, though equally incomprehenſible, as it may make it eaſier to us to acquieſce in our neceſſary want of comprehenſion on the ſubject. Now, in ſome reſpects, the idea of *ſpace*, though not intelligent, and therefore incapable of ſelf comprehenſion, and no cauſe of any thing, is ſimilar to that of the intelligent cauſe of all things, in that it is neceſſarily *infinite*, and *uncauſed*. For the ideas of the creation, or of the annihilation of ſpace, are equally inadmiſſible. Though we may in our imagination, exclude from exiſtence every thing elſe, ſtill the idea of *ſpace* will remain. We cannot, even in idea, ſuppoſe

it

it not to *have been*, not to be *infinite*, or not to be *uncauſed*. Now it may be, in fact, as impoſſible that an *intelligent infinite Being* ſhould not exiſt, as that *infinite ſpace* ſhould not exiſt, though we are neceſſarily incapable of perceiving that it *muſt* be ſo.

" If it be ſaid that ſpace is properly nothing at all, I anſwer, that ſpace has real properties, as cannot be denied, and I know of no other definition of a *ſubſtance*, than that which has properties. Take away all the properties of *any thing*, and nothing will be left; juſt ſo alſo, and no otherwiſe, nothing will be left of *ſpace* when the properties of length, breadth, and depth, are ſuppoſed to be taken away.

" Secondly, it may be ſaid, that *a whole* may have properties which the parts have not, as a ſound may proceed from the vibration of a ſtring, the component particles of which could not produce any, or as the faculty of thinking may be the reſult of a certain arrangement of the parts of the brain, which ſeparately have no thought.

13 I answer, that it cannot but be that every *whole* must have some properties which do not belong to the *separate parts*, but still, if all the separate parts require a cause, the whole must; and whatever peculiar powers belong to a whole, as such, they must be such as necessarily result from the arrangement of the parts, and the combination of their powers. But no combination or arrangement whatever of *caused Beings* can constitute an *uncaused* one. This affects us like a manifest contradiction.

14 To say, that the whole universe may have had no cause, when it is acknowledged that each of its parts, separately taken, must have had one, would be the same thing as saying that *a house* may have had no maker, though the walls, the roof, the windows, the doors, and all the parts of which it consists, must have had one. Such a conclusion, with respect to a house, or the universe, would equally contradict our *constant experience*, and what we may call our *common sense*.

15 With respect to *thinking*, we only do not see *how* it results from the arrangement of

matter, when facts prove that it *does* result from it, the properties of *thinking* and *materiality* being only *different*, not *contrary*; whereas *cauſed* and *uncauſed* are the direct reverſe of each other.

Suppoſing, however, that intelligence *could* reſult from the preſent arrangement of ſuch bodies as the ſun, the earth, and the other planets, &c. (which, however, is ſo unlike the uniform compoſition of a *brain*, that the argument from analogy entirely fails) ſo that all that is *intellectual* in the univerſe, ſhould be the neceſſary reſult of what is not intellectual in it, and, conſequently, there ſhould be what has ſometimes been called *a ſoul of the univerſe*, the hypotheſis is, in fact, that of a Deity, though we ourſelves ſhould enter into the compoſition of it, and there would be a real foundation for religion. But our imagination revolts at the idea, and we are compelled, as the eaſieſt ſolution of the phenomena, to acquieſce in the belief of an intelligent uncauſed being, entirely diſtinct from the univerſe of which he is the author.

Thirdly, it will be ſaid, that, as all the intelligence that we are acquainted with reſides in the brains of men and animals, the Deity, if he be a Being diſtinct from the univerſe, and intelligent, muſt, whatever be his form, have in him ſomething reſembling the ſtructure of the brain.

I anſwer, that the preceding train of reaſoning proves the contrary. An uncauſed intelligent author of nature, and one that is diſtinct from it, there muſt be. This Being, however, is not the object of our ſenſes. Therefore the ſeat of intelligence, though it be ſomething viſible and tangible in us, is not *neceſſarily* and *univerſally* ſo.

Beſides, it only follows from the Deity and the human brain being both intelligent, that they muſt have this in common, and ſomething (if any ſuch thing there be) on which that property depends; but this may not be any thing neceſſarily connected with what is viſible or tangible, or the object of any of our ſenſes. Many things have common properties that are very diſſimilar in other reſpects. If we had known nothing

elaſtic

elaſtic beſides *ſteel*, we might have concluded that nothing was elaſtic but ſteel, or ſomething equally ſolid and hard; and yet we find elaſticity belong to ſo rare a ſubſtance as *air*, and altogether unlike ſteel in every other reſpect. The divine mind, therefore, may be intelligent, in common with the mind of man, and yet not have the viſible and tangible properties, or any thing of the *conſiſtence* of the brain.

There are many *powers* in nature, even thoſe by which bodies are acted upon, where nothing is viſible; as the power of *gravitation*, and of *repulſion* at a diſtance from the viſible ſurfaces of bodies. There are even ſuch powers in places occupied by other bodies. Both gravitation and magnetiſm act through ſubſtances interpoſed between the bodies poſſeſſed of them and thoſe on which they act. The divine power, therefore, may penetrate, and fill all ſpace, occupied or unoccupied by other ſubſtances, and yet be itſelf the object of none of our ſenſes. And what do we mean by *ſubſtance*, but that in which we ſuppoſe powers to reſide; ſo that wherever

powers can exiſt, what we call the *ſubſtance* cannot be excluded, unleſs we ſuppoſe Beings to act where they are not.

21 Fourthly, it was ſaid by the atheiſts among the antients, that the univerſe might have been formed by the *fortuitous concourſe of atoms*, which had been in motion from all eternity, and therefore muſt, they ſay, have been in all poſſible ſituations.

22 But, beſides many other improbabilities, which may make it doubtful whether any perſon was ever really ſatisfied with the hypotheſis, thoſe who advanced it were not philoſophers enough to know what *atoms* are. If we have any ideas to words, atoms muſt mean *ſolid particles of matter*, that is, maſſes of matter; which, however ſmall, are perfectly *compact*, and therefore conſiſt of parts that have ſtrong powers of *attraction*. But what reaſon have we, from experience, to ſuppoſe it poſſible, that theſe ſmall maſſes of matter could have theſe powers without communication *ab extra*?

23 In what reſpects could thoſe atoms differ from pieces of wood, ſtone, or metal, at preſent;

ſent; and is a piece of wood, ſtone, or metal, capable even of comprehending, much leſs of communicating its own powers, any more than a magnet? As well, therefore, might a magnet have been originally exiſtent, as any coherent atom, or an atom poſſeſſed of the moſt ſimple powers whatever. In fact, we may juſt as well ſuppoſe a *man* to have been that originally exiſtent being, as either of them.

Beſides, admitting the exiſtence of theſe original atoms, can we ſuppoſe them to have been moved any otherwiſe than as ſuch bodies are moved at preſent, that is, by an external force. It is directly repugnant to all our experience to ſuppoſe any ſuch thing, and could they be arranged in a manner expreſſive of the moſt exquiſite deſign, without a mover poſſeſſed of competent intelligence?

Thus far, I flatter myſelf, I have advanced on ſufficiently ſolid ground, in proving that there muſt have been an originally intelligent cauſe of the univerſe, diſtinct from the univerſe itſelf; or that *there is a God.* In proceeding farther I cannot promiſe to be always quite ſo clear, but I will promiſe to

be *ingenuous*, purſuing ſuch analogies as I am able to find, and no farther than they will naturally lead me.

Whether what I have already advanced will appear as ſatisfactory to you as it does to me, I cannot tell. If your mind be as unbiaſſed, as I am willing to hope it is, I think it muſt make ſome impreſſion; for there is a ſtrong natural evidence in favour of the belief of a God, and only ſomething *incomprehenſible* to us, but by no means contrary to evidence, or reaſon, againſt it. And there is ſomething ſo pleaſing in the idea of a ſupreme *author*, and conſequently, as I ſhall ſhow, of a ſupreme *governor* of the world, to virtuous and ingenuous minds, infinitely preferable to the idea of *a blind fate*, and a *fatherleſs deſerted world*, that if the mind was only *in equilibrio* with reſpect to the argument, it would, in fact, be determined by this bias. A truly ingenuous mind, therefore, will not only decide in favour of the belief of a God, but will ſo decide with joy.

I am, &c.

LETTER

LETTER IV.

Of the neceſſary Attributes of the original Cauſe of all Things.

DEAR SIR,

IN the preceding Letters I hope I have removed your greateſt difficulties with reſpect to the belief of an *original intelligent cauſe of the univerſe*; having proved that, how incomprehenſible ſoever ſuch a Being may be to us, yet that ſuch a Being muſt neceſſarily exiſt. My argument in ſhort was this. There are in the univerſe innumerable and moſt evident marks of *deſign*, and it is directly contrary to all our obſervation and experience, to ſuppoſe that it ſhould have come into being without a cauſe adequate to it, with reſpect both to power and intelligence. A Being, therefore, poſſeſſed of ſuch power and intelligence *muſt* exiſt. If this Being, the immediate maker

of

of the univerſe, has not exiſted from all eternity, he muſt have derived his being and powers from one who has; and this *originally exiſtent and intelligent Being*, which the actual exiſtence of the univerſe compels us to come to at laſt, is the Being that we call *God*.

It is of no avail to ſay, that we have no *conception* concerning the original exiſtence of ſuch a Being, for our having *no idea at all* of any thing implies no impoſſibility, or contradiction whatever. This is mere *ignorance*, and an ignorance which, circumſtanced as we are, we can never overcome; and the *actual phenomena* cannot be accounted for without the ſuppoſition of ſuch a Being. Incomprehenſible as it may be, in ever ſo many reſpects, it is an hypotheſis that is abſolutely neceſſary to account for evident *facts*. We may, therefore, give what ſcope we will to our aſtoniſhment, and admiration, yet *believe* (if we be guided by demonſtrative evidence) we *muſt*. And it is a belief mixed with joy as well as with wonder. Let us now conſider what may be either neceſſarily inferred,

or

or is with the greateſt probability implied, in the idea of this *original cauſe of all things*.

3 The firſt obſervation I would make is, that this Being muſt be what we term *infinite*; that is, ſince he is intelligent, there can be no bounds to his intelligence, or he muſt know all that is capable of being known; and ſince he is powerful (his works correſponding to what we call effects of power) his power muſt be infinite, or capable of producing whatever is poſſible in itſelf.

4 Since the reaſon why we cannot help concluding that a man, or any other Being that we are acquainted with, could not be this originally exiſtent Being, is the *limitation* of his knowledge and power (not being capable even of comprehending any thing equal to himſelf) and ſince this muſt have been the caſe with reſpect to any other Being, how great ſo ever, who had not this ſelf-comprehenſion, the originally exiſting Being muſt neceſſarily have this power. A Being perfectly comprehending himſelf and every thing elſe cannot have knowledge leſs than what may, in one ſenſe at leaſt, be termed

infinite,

infinite, for it comprehends *every thing* that exists. Admitting this, we cannot suppose that it does not likewise extend to every thing that *necessarily follows* from all that actually exists; and after this, we shall not know how to suppose that he should not be able to know what would be the result of any *possible* existence, for we cannot think this to be more difficult than the former.

3 Besides, in pursuance, in some measure, of this argument, we cannot help concluding, that a power capable of producing all that actually exists (so immense and wonderful, is what is known of the system of the universe) must be equal to any effect that is *possible in itself*. At least, if this inference be not strictly *necessary*, yet, having been compelled to admit the existence of a power so far exceeding all that we can comprehend, and all that we can imagine, when we even strain our conceptions to form an idea of infinite, we can see no reason why it should not be actually and strictly so.

4 Nay, having arrived at the knowledge of a Being who must have the power of self-

comprehenſion, and alſo that of producing all that exiſts, we ſeem to require ſome external poſitive *cauſe of limitation* to his knowledge and power; which external poſitive cauſe we look for in vain. We therefore cannot feel the leaſt reluctance in acquieſcing in the belief that the original author of all things is infinite in knowledge and power. Having proved him to be capable of knowing and doing *ſo much*, we ſhould, from a natural analogy, even revolt at the idea of his not being able to know and to do even *more*, if more were poſſible. This perſuaſion we arrive at by purſuing the moſt natural train of reaſoning, and the moſt obvious deductions from the premiſes before us; ſo that any other inferences would be *unnatural*. We need not ſcruple, therefore, to conſider it as an undoubted truth, however exceeding our comprehenſion, and therefore our power of *proper demonſtration*, that God, the originally exiſting Being, or the firſt cauſe of all things, is a Being of ſtrictly infinite power and knowledge.

Secondly, he must be *omnipresent*, or occupy all space, though this attribute is equally incomprehensible by us with the infinite extent of his power or knowledge.

That God must be present to all his works is a necessary conclusion; while we all admit that no power can act but where it is. Besides, existing, as he does, without any foreign cause, by what we call (though inaccurately, as all our language on this subject must be) *a natural necessity*, there can be no reason why he should exist in one place and not in another. He must, therefore, exist equally in all places, even through the boundless extent of infinite space, an idea just as incomprehensible, as his necessary existence, but not more so. After this, the probability will be, that his *works*, as well as *himself*, occupy the whole extent of space, infinite as it must necessarily be, and that as *he* could have had no beginning, so neither had *his works*.

Having been obliged to admit so much that is altogether incomprehensible by us, it is by an easy chain of consequences that we

come to theſe farther concluſions, which are not more incomprehenſible than the former. Nay, if the univerſe had bounds, we ſhould, if we reflect on the ſubject, be apt to wonder at thoſe bounds, as much as we ſhould wonder at any limitation to the knowledge of a Being who has the inconceivable power of ſelf-comprehenſion, or at the limitation of his power, who has produced the univerſe.

10 Again, that a Being, infinitely intelligent and infinitely powerful, ſhould remain inactive a whole eternity, which muſt have been the caſe if the creation had any beginning at all, is alſo an idea that we can never reconcile ourſelves to. An eternal creation, being the act of an eternal Being, is not at all more incomprehenſible than the eternal exiſtence of that Being himſelf. Both are incomprehenſible, but the one is the moſt natural conſequence of the other. In fact, there is no greater objection to the ſuppoſition of the *creation* having been eternal, than to *duration itſelf* having been eternal; for there cannot be any aſſignable or imaginable

ginable period in duration, in which the creation might not have taken place *.

Thirdly, that this infinite Being, who has exiſted without change, muſt continue to exiſt without change to eternity, is likewiſe a concluſion that we cannot help drawing, though, the ſubject being incomprehenſible, we may not be able to complete the demonſtration. It is, however, little, if at all, ſhort of the force of a demonſtration, that the ſame *natural neceſſity* by which he always has exiſted, muſt, of courſe, prevent any change whatever. Beſides, if any cauſe of change had exiſted, it muſt have operated in a whole eternity that is already paſt. We ſhould alſo naturally conclude that, as no Being could *make* himſelf (ſince that would imply that he exiſted, and did not exiſt, at the ſame time) ſo neither can any being *unmake*, or materially change, at leaſt not *annihilate* himſelf; and, being omnipotent, no

* This opinion of the infinity and eternity of the works of an infinite and eternal deity, though it ſeems to me to be the moſt probable, is by no means a neceſſary part of the ſyſtem of natural religion. The belief of the exiſtence of a God, and of a providence, may very well be held without it.

other

other Being, eſpecially none that he himſelf has produced (and in reality there cannot be any other) can be ſuppoſed capable of producing any change in him. Whatever, therefore, the ſupreme Being is, and always has been, he ever muſt be.

Fourthly. There cannot be more than *one* ſuch Being as this. Though this propoſition may not be ſtrictly demonſtrable by us, it is a ſuppoſition more natural than any other, and it perfectly harmonizes with what has been ſtrictly proved, and deduced already. Nay, there ſeems to be ſomething hardly diſtinguiſhable from a contradiction in the ſuppoſition of there being *two infinite Beings of the ſame kind*, ſince, in idea, they would perfectly *coincide*. We clearly perceive that there cannot be two *infinite ſpaces*, and ſince the analogy between this infinite unintelligent Being, as we may call it, and the infinite intelligent one, has been ſeen to be pretty remarkable in one inſtance, it may be equally ſtrict here; ſo that, were our faculties equal to the ſubject, and had we proper *data*, I think we ſhould expect to

perceive, that there could no more be two infinite intelligent and omnipreſent Beings, than there can be two infinite ſpaces.

13 Indeed, their being *numerically two* would, in ſome meaſure, limit one another, ſo that, by the reaſoning we have hitherto followed, neither of them could be the originally exiſtent Being. Suppoſing them to be equally omnipotent, and that one of them ſhould intend to do, and the other to undo, the ſame thing, their power would be equally balanced; and if their intentions always coincided, and they equally filled all ſpace, they would be as much, and to all intents and purpoſes, *one and the ſame Being*, as the coincidence of two infinite ſpaces would make but one infinite ſpace.

14 I appeal to yourſelf, whether, after having admitted what the *actual phenomena* of nature compel us to admit, we could, without a real difficulty, and a manifeſt incongruity in our mode of reaſoning, ſtop in any part of the progreſs through which I have now led you, whether every ſucceeding ſtep has been a ſtrictly neceſſary conſequence of the preceding,

preceding, or not. Nay, the inferences have been ſo natural, that we cannot help ſuſpecting that it is owing to the imperfection of our faculties, and our neceſſarily imperfect knowledge of the ſubject, that we do not *ſee* the inferences to be perfectly ſtrict and concluſive.

15 We can hardly doubt but that a Being of infinite knowledge muſt clearly comprehend them all; that ſuch a Being muſt be able to perceive both that, independently of every thing elſe actually exiſting, *he himſelf* could not but have exiſted, that he could not but have had *infinite knowledge and power*, that he could not have been excluded from any part of even infinite ſpace, that he could not but have acted from all eternity, that he could not be ſubject to any change, and that there could not be any other Being equal or comparable to himſelf, or that ſhould not be dependent upon himſelf. We do not ſee the neceſſary connexion of all theſe properties, and therefore we cannot ſee *how* any other Being can; but the caſe is ſuch,

that we cannot help ſuſpecting that it is owing to our imperfection that we are not able to do it.

If you ſay that I have bewildered and confounded you with theſe ſpeculations, you muſt, however, acknowledge, that it has been in conſequence of following the beſt lights the ſubject could afford us; and that to have come to any other concluſions we muſt, in all caſes, have taken a leſs probability inſtead of a greater, and ſomething leſs inſtead of ſomething more, conſonant to what we were, from the firſt, compelled by the plaineſt phenomena to admit.

You will pleaſe, however, to obſerve that, in all this, I do not pretend to prove *a priori* that, without any regard to the ſuppoſition of an external world, there muſt have been what may be called a *ſelf-exiſtent Being*; but only that, having firſt proved, from the phenomena of nature, that there muſt have been an eternally exiſting intelligent Being, we cannot help concluding (at leaſt according to the ſtrongeſt probabilities) that, in

consequence of being *originally existing*, and the intelligent cause of all things, he must be infinitely knowing and powerful, fill infinite space, and have no equal.

I am, &c.

LETTER V.

The Evidence for the GENERAL BENEVOLENCE *of the Deity.*

DEAR SIR,

I Flatter myself that, in the preceding Letters, I have removed, or at least have lessened, your difficulties relating to the arguments for the being and primary attributes of the Deity. It is true that I have led you into the region of *infinites* and *incomprehensibles*; but then *reason* herself conducted us thither, and we did not lose sight of her while we were there. Among infi-

nites there are analogies peculiar to themſelves, and thoſe who cannot form an adequate idea of any thing infinite, may yet judge of thoſe *analogies*, as well as of thoſe of finites. Infinites frequently occur in geometrical and algebraical inveſtigations, and yet the moſt clear and undeniable conſequences may be drawn from them.

2. The phenomena of nature prove that there muſt have been ſome *originally exiſtent Being*, and of ſuch a nature, that it could not derive its exiſtence and powers from any thing prior to it. Conſequently, it could not be any thing of a finite nature, ſuch as plants, or animals, or any thing that we ſee here; for theſe, not being able even to comprehend their own conſtitution, muſt neceſſarily have derived it from ſome Being of ſuperior knowledge and power; and the idea of the degree of knowledge and power requiſite to form ſuch a ſyſtem as this, of which we are a part, cannot be diſtinguiſhed from that of *infinite*. Indeed, had it been, in any reſpect, finite, it would only have been in the condition of a plant, or an animal, of a more

perfect

perfect kind, and therefore, like them, would have required a ſuperior cauſe. The evident probability therefore is, that the original intelligent cauſe of all things, and who muſt neceſſarily have been *uncauſed*, is, in the ſtricteſt ſenſe of the word, *infinite* in knowledge and power; as, for reaſons that have been given, he muſt likewiſe be infinite in duration, and extenſion, or commenſurate with all time, and all ſpace. And though we are utterly at a loſs to conceive *how* ſo great a Being as this ſhould himſelf require no cauſe, it is even demonſtrable both that ſuch a Being *doth* exiſt, and that he *could not* have any cauſe, and therefore, we *muſt* acquieſce in our inability of having any ideas on the ſubject.

3. This caſe is, however, evidently different from that of all finite Beings, all of which neceſſarily require a cauſe; and, though we cannot conceive it, the reaſon why this great Being requires none, may be *his being infinite*; juſt as ſpace muſt neceſſarily have exiſted, and have been infinite, and without any cauſe whatever. A difficulty in con-

ceiving *how* a thing can be is no proof of its impoſſibility; and indeed there cannot be a clearer inſtance of it than the preſent. For nothing can be more evident than that ſuch Beings as plants and animals muſt have had a ſuperior cauſe; nothing alſo can be more evident than that they could not have proceeded from each other by ſucceſſion from all eternity; and therefore nothing can be more evident, than that the primary cauſe of all theſe things muſt himſelf have exiſted from all eternity, without any thing prior, or ſuperior to him, notwithſtanding our utter inability to conceive *how* all this ſhould be.

4. Since it is evident, from the innumerable marks of deſign through the whole ſyſtem of nature, that the author of it is intelligent, and, conſequently, had ſome *end* in view in what he did, let us, in the next place, inquire what this end probably was; and I flatter myſelf that, inſtead of meeting with more difficulties in this part of our inquiry, as has often been repreſented, we ſhall, in reality, meet with fewer than we have had

before;

before; and here analogy, founded on eſtabliſhed aſſociations of ideas, is our only guide.

4 *Means* and *ends* are perpetually occurring to our obſervation. Hence no habit is more fixed than that of diſtinguiſhing them, and of perceiving the relation they bear to each other. We hardly ever ſee the hand of man without perceiving marks of deſign, and they are not leſs evident in the works of God. That the *eye* was made for ſeeing, that is, perceiving the form and colour of remote objects, and the *ear* for hearing, or perceiving the ſounds made by them, is no leſs evident than that the *pen* and the *ink* with which I write were made and provided for the purpoſe of writing.

5 We are likewiſe juſt as able, in many caſes, to diſtinguiſh a *perfection* from a *defect* in the works of *nature*, as in thoſe of *art*. For the analogy is ſo great, that we cannot help applying theſe terms to them, and reaſoning in the ſame manner concerning them. If I go into a mill, and ſee every wheel in motion, and going with as little friction and noiſe as poſſible,

poſſible, I conclude that every thing is as the maker intended it, and that the machine is complete in its kind, anſwering the end for which it was made. But if I ſee a pinion break, and the motion of the machine in part obſtructed by it, I immediately conclude that this was not intended by the maker, ſince it muſt contribute to unfit the machine for its proper functions.

In like manner, judging of the works of God as I do concerning thoſe of man, when I ſee a plant in its vigour, and an animal of its proper ſize and form, healthy, and ſtrong, I conclude that theſe are as they were intended to be, and that they are fitted to anſwer the end of their creation, whatever that was. Theſe, therefore, I attend to, and not to trees that are blighted, or animals that are maimed and diſeaſed, when I wiſh to form a right judgment of the deſign of their maker. And indeed, we do ſee that, in general, plants and animals are, to a conſiderable degree, healthy, and that the ſickly and diſeaſed among them, are exceptions to the general obſervation.

Now,

8 Now, what is health, but a ſtate of *enjoy-ment* in beings capable of it, and what is *diſeaſe*, but a diminution of enjoyment, if not a ſtate of actual *pain*. Since, then, the obvious deſign of the animal economy was *health*, and not *ſickneſs*, is it not evident that the intention of their maker muſt have been their *happineſs*, not their *miſery*? I do not know any concluſion more obvious, or more ſatisfactory than this. What the ſupreme Author of all things may *farther intend* by the happineſs of his creatures, whether a gratification to *himſelf*, or whether it proceeds from a diſintereſted regard to *them*, I cannot pretend to judge; but that the happineſs of the creation was intended by the author of it, is juſt as evident as that the deſign of the millwright was that the wheels of his machine ſhould keep in motion, and not that they ſhould be obſtructed.

9 If, notwithſtanding this obvious deſign, deduced from the conſideration of the animal economy, any of them, or all of them, ſhould not be found in a ſtate of actual health and enjoyment, I ſhould rather infer that their

their author had miſſed of his aim, and was diſappointed in what he had in view, than imagine he had not *intended* their health and their happineſs: as though I ſhould find that all the mills in my neighbourhood ſtood ſtill, and could not be kept in motion, I ſhould be ſtill ſatisfied, from their conſtruction, that they were intended to keep in motion, but that the artificer had been diſappointed in his object. However, in nature, it is a fact that a ſtate of health (that is tolerable, though not perfect health) is general, and a ſtate of ſickneſs comparatively rare. Upon the whole, therefore, the creation is happy, though not perfectly ſo; and the obvious end of the creation is, in fact, in a great meaſure, anſwered.

It is another argument for the benevolence of the Deity that many, and perhaps all pains and evils (the cauſes of pain) tend to check and exterminate themſelves; whereas pleaſures extend and propagate themſelves, and that without limits.

Pain itſelf is an affection of ſentient Beings. Now, all ſentient Beings that we

are

are acquainted with (in whatever manner that effect is produced) endeavour to ſhun pains and procure pleaſures, and all the known cauſes of them. And as our knowledge and power, in this reſpect, advance with our experience, nothing is wanting to enable us to exterminate all pain, and to attain to complete happineſs, but a continuance of being.

12. Mental pains do as certainly tend to check and exterminate themſelves as the corporeal ones. For the ſenſations of ſhame and remorſe always lead us to avoid whatever it be in our conduct that has expoſed us to them; and the ſatisfaction we feel from having acquitted ourſelves with integrity and honour, does likewiſe encourage us to act the part that will beſt ſecure the continuance of that moſt valuable ſpecies of human felicity.

13. Where volition is not concerned (though the laws of volition are as much as any thing elſe in the ſyſtem of nature the laws of God) and mere mechaniſm takes place, it is acknowledged by phyſicians that all diſeaſes are the effort of nature to remove ſome obſtruction,

ſtruction, ſomething that impedes the animal functions, and thereby to defer the hour of diſſolution, and to recover a ſtate of more perfect health and enjoyment; ſo that nothing is wanting to the removal of all this claſs of evils, but a perfect *conformation* and ſufficient *ſtrength* of thoſe parts of the animal frame in which the diſorder is ſeated, with ſufficient *time* for them to diſcharge their proper functions. But the intention of nature, that is, of the God of nature, who works by general laws (in which, of courſe, there are many exceptions) is the ſame whether the animal ſurvive the ſtruggle, which is generally the caſe, or whether it ſinks under it. A hundred diſeaſes terminate favourably for one that is fatal. Every cold is the beginning of a fever, but very ſeldom proceeds ſo far as to receive ſo alarming an appellation.

If we look into the external world, we ſhall ſee equal reaſon to be thankful for cold weather, ſtorms, and tempeſts, with every thing elſe that we ſometimes complain of, as far as we are able to underſtand their

real

real tendency, and ultimate effects. And they are not only leſs evils in lieu of greater, but alſo (like the diſorders to which the animal frame is ſubject) tend to remove ſome obſtruction, and to diffuſe more equally either the *electric matter*, or ſomething elſe, the equal diſtribution of which is requiſite to the good condition of the world.

If we conſider *man*, the moſt important object in this part of the creation, we muſt conſider corporeal pleaſures as being of the leaſt conſequence to his happineſs, becauſe intellectual gratifications are evidently of unſpeakably more value to him. Man enjoys the time paſt and future as well as the preſent; and, in general, mankind are tolerably happy in this reſpect, deriving more pleaſure than pain from *reflection*. Man always hopes for the beſt; and even paſt labour and pain is generally pleaſing in recollection, ſo that whether he looks backwards or forwards, his views are upon the whole pleaſing.

If we conſider man in a moral reſpect, we ſhall find that for one man who really ſuffers from remorſe of conſcience, numbers think

ſo well of themſelves, and of their conduct, that it gives them pleaſure to reflect upon it; and, in fact, acts of kindneſs and benevolence far exceed thoſe of cruelty; and in all reſpects *moderation* (which is the ſtandard of virtue) is much more common than *exceſs*; and indeed if it was not ſo, exceſs would not be ſo much noticed, and cenſured as it is. Upon the whole, virtue ſeems to bear the ſame proportion to vice, that happineſs does to miſery, or health to ſickneſs, in the world.

Beſides, to judge of the intention of the Creator, we ſhould not only conſider the actual ſtate of things, but take in as much as we can of the *tendencies* of things in future. Now, it requires but little judgment to ſee that the world is in a ſtate of *melioration*, in a variety of reſpects; and for the ſame reaſon, it will probably continue to improve, and perhaps without limits; ſo that our poſterity have a much better proſpect before them than we have had.

A great proportion of the miſery of man is owing to *ignorance*, and it cannot be denied

nied that the world grows wiſer every day. Phyſicians and ſurgeons know how much leſs men ſuffer now than they did in ſimilar caſes formerly, owing to improvements in the ſcience of medicine, and in ſurgical operations. To read of the methods of the ancients with reſpect to the ſtone in the bladder, is enough to fill one with horror. It was not till the time of Celſus that the practice of extracting the ſtone was known; and till of late years in compariſon, it was not expected that one in twenty of thoſe who ſubmitted to the operation would recover; whereas it is now a tolerably ſafe operation; and beſides, we are not without the hope of diſcovering methods of diſſolving the ſtone, without pain, in the bladder. This is only one of many inſtances of improvements that leſſen the ſufferings of mankind. This ſkill is indeed in a manner confined to Europeans, but theſe occupy a conſiderable part of the globe, and the knowledge of Europeans will, no doubt, gradually extend over the whole world.

19 Civilization and good government have made great advances in Europe, and by means of this men live in a ſtate of much greater ſecurity and happineſs; and even the intercourſe between diſtant places, and diſtant countries, is both ſafe and pleaſurable; whereas in former times, this intercourſe was hardly practicable. Let any perſon read of the ſtate of Italy, and that of the continent of Europe in general, in the times of Petrarch, and he will be ſatisfied that the preſent ſtate of things is a paradiſe in compariſon with it.

20 War is unſpeakably leſs dreadful than formerly, though it is a great evil ſtill; and as true political knowledge advances, and the advantages of *commerce*, which ſuppoſes a peaceable intercourſe, are more experienced, it is fairly to be preſumed, that wars will not fail to be leſs frequent, as well as leſs ſanguinary; ſo that ſocieties of men, as well as families and individuals, will find it to be their common intereſt to be good neighbours, and national jealouſy will give place to national generoſity.

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21 The progreſs of knowledge, and other cauſes, have greatly improved the ſpirit of the various *religions* that have prevailed in the world. Thoſe peculiarly horrid modes of religion which enjoined human ſacrifices, as well as many abominable practices, have been long extinct; and perſecution to death for conſcience ſake, by which the world ſuffered ſo much under the Pagan Roman emperors, and even the philoſophical and mild Marcus Aurelius, as well as in the days of Papal tyranny, and under other eccleſiaſtical hierarchies, we have reaſon to think, will hardly ever be revived; the folly as well as the cruelty of theſe practices is ſo generally acknowledged. In conſequence of this greater liberty of ſpeculating upon all ſubjects, truth has a much fairer chance of prevailing in the world; and the knowledge and general ſpread of truth cannot fail to be attended with a great variety of advantages, favourable to the virtue and happineſs of mankind.

22 We have no occaſion to conſider by what particular *means* theſe advantages have ac-

crued to mankind: for whatever the *secondary cauſes* may have been, they could not have operated without the kind proviſion of the firſt and proper cauſe of all; and therefore, they are to be conſidered as arguments of his benevolence, or of the preference that he gives to happineſs before miſery.

Upon the whole, the evidence for the *general benevolence* of the deity ſeems to be abundantly ſatisfactory, and all that can be objected on this ſubject is to the *infinite extent* of it. And yet it ſhould ſeem, that there can be no bounds to an affection that has been proved to be *real*. Why the Divine Being ſhould love his creatures *to a certain degree*, and no more, why he ſhould intend them a certain portion of happineſs, and not a greater, is a queſtion that cannot eaſily be anſwered. The probability, that an affection unqueſtionably real is actually unbounded, diſpoſes us to inquire whether, notwithſtanding appearances, this may not be the caſe here. And, though we cannot prove the ſtrict infinity of the divine benevolence, or give ſo much evidence for it as

we

we can for that of his power and knowledge; yet the probability will, I think, appear to be in favour of it, if we sufficiently attend to the considerations that I shall urge in my next.

I am, &c.

LETTER VI.

Arguments for the infinite Benevolence of the Deity.

DEAR SIR,

HAVING shown, in my last letter, that the supreme cause of all things must be possessed of at least *general benevolence*, in this I shall endeavour to shew that, notwithstanding some seemingly contrary appearances, this benevolence *may*, in a sufficiently proper sense, be considered as *infinite*. For this purpose I would wish you to attend to the following considerations.

First. That any *dependent Being* ſhould be at all times infinitely happy, muſt neceſſarily be impoſſible; for ſuch a Being muſt be infinitely knowing and powerful, that is, in fact, equal to the divine Being himſelf. The happineſs of every individual muſt, therefore, neceſſarily be *limited*, either in *degree*, or by a *mixture of unhappineſs*; and whether this neceſſary limitation is beſt made in one way or the other, can only be determined by the deity himſelf. However, the method of limitation by a *mixture of pain* will not, I dare ſay, appear uneligible to perſons of competent judgment.

It is even a common thing in human life to prefer this *variety*, rather than an unvaried degree of *moderate enjoyment*. This mode of limitation being ſuppoſed preferable, nothing remains to be cenſured, but the *degree* of miſery proper, or neceſſary, to be mixed with any proportion of happineſs, and the *time*, and other *circumſtances*, of the introduction of this miſery. And in this no perſon, ſurely, will pretend to dictate to a

Being

Being of infinite wiſdom, whoſe general benevolence is unqueſtionable. No objection of this kind, therefore, can deſerve any reply.

4 In theſe reſpects, however, the probability *a priori*, in general at leaſt, is in favour of what we ſee actually to take place; ſo that it is a fair preſumption, that, as our experience advances, we ſhall ſee more and more reaſon to be ſatisfied with the diſpenſations of providence. Becauſe, in general, we perceive a *gradation* in every thing from worſe to better, which is a circumſtance highly favourable to happineſs, as it encourages *hope*, which is itſelf a principal ingredient in human happineſs.

5 Several improvements in the ſtate of the world in general have been mentioned already, and the like is no leſs manifeſt in the caſe of individuals; the ſufferings of our infant ſtate exceeding thoſe that we meet with afterwards, all things conſidered. Suppoſing a ſtate of health, and competent ſubſiſtence for all, which (being the evident in-

tention of nature) muſt here be ſuppoſed, our enjoyments are continually increaſing in real value from infancy to old age. Let a child have the moſt perfect health, it is impoſſible to educate him in a proper manner, ſo as to lay a foundation for his own future happineſs, without ſubjecting him to many diſappointments and mortifications, with reſpect to which no ſatisfactory account can be given *him*, ſo as to make him acquieſce under them. Whereas, beſides that the purſuits and enjoyments of manhood are in themſelves greatly ſuperior to thoſe of childhood, we acquire by experience ſuch a *comprehenſion of mind*, as enables us to bear without murmuring the evils that fall to our lot; and as this comprehenſion of mind extends itſelf every day, ſuppoſing what here muſt alſo be ſuppoſed (as being within the intention of nature) a rational and virtuous life, our ſtock of intellectual enjoyments is augmenting continually, ſo that the moſt deſirable part of a well-ſpent life is *old age*. And it is evidently and highly ſo, provided that,

that, together with health, a man enjoys what is also the intention of nature, the society of a rising and promising family.

The peculiar satisfaction with which a christian shuts his eyes on the world, will not, perhaps, be thought a proper article in this account; though, whether these hopes be well or ill founded, they are *actually enjoyed* by great numbers of the human race; and, together with every thing else that actually takes place, must have been intended for us in this life. However, I am well satisfied that a properly natural death, or death occasioned by the mere exhausting (as we may term it) of the vital powers, in a sufficient length of time, provided no superstitious fears accompany it, is not attended with aversion or pain.

Perhaps no part of the general system will appear at first sight more liable to objection than this circumstance of *death*, and the train of diseases that lead to it. But by this means room is made for a *succession of creatures*, of each species, so that the *sum of happiness* is, upon the whole, greater. With respect

reſpect to man, unleſs the whole plan of his conſtitution, and all the laws of his nature, were changed, it is unſpeakably more deſirable that there ſhould be a ſucceſſion, than that the ſame individuals ſhould continue on the ſtage always. For a new generation learns wiſdom from the follies of the old, which would only have grown more inveterate every year. Thus the whole ſpecies advances more quickly to maturity; and to the *ſpecies*, the obſtinacy, and other infirmities of old age, will probably be ever unknown.

Secondly, pain itſelf, and *as ſuch*, is not without its real uſe with reſpect to true happineſs; ſo that, other circumſtances (of which we can be no judges) being ſuppoſed right, we have reaſon to be thankful for the pains and diſtreſſes to which we are ſubject. For pain muſt not be conſidered only with reſpect to the moment of ſenſation, but alſo as to its future neceſſary effects; and according to the general law of our nature, admirably explained by Dr. Hartley, the impreſſions of pain remaining in the mind

fall at length within the limits of pleaſure, and contribute moſt of all to the future enjoyment of life; ſo that, without this reſource, life would neceſſarily grow inſipid and tireſome.

¶ However, without recurring to abſtruſe conſiderations, it is well known, that the recollection of paſt troubles, after a certain interval, becomes highly pleaſurable; and it is a pleaſure of a very durable kind. It is ſo generally known to be ſo, as to furniſh an argument for bearing troubles, and making them leſs felt at the time of their greateſt preſſure. Thus Æneas, in Virgil, is repreſented as ſaying to his companions in diſtreſs, *poſt hæc meminiſſe juvabit.*

¶ Nothing can be more evident than the uſe of pain to children. How is it poſſible to teach them ſufficient caution againſt abſolute deſtruction, by falls, burns, &c. but by the actual feeling of pain from theſe circumſtances. No parent, or any perſon who has given much attention to children, will ſay that admonition alone would anſwer the purpoſe;

purpoſe; whereas greater evils are moſt effectually prevented, in the admirable plan of nature, by the actual experience of leſs evils. What is more pungent than the ſtings of ſhame and remorſe, in conſequence of improprieties in conduct, and of vices? But could prudence and virtue be effectually inculcated by any other means? No perſon converſant in the buſineſs of education will venture to ſay that they could.

As the pains and mortifications of our infant ſtate are the natural means of leſſening the pains and mortifications of advanced life; ſo I made it appear to the ſatisfaction of Dr. Hartley, in the ſhort correſpondence I had with him, that his theory furniſhes pretty fair preſumptions, that the pains of this life may ſuffice for the whole of our future exiſtence; we having now reſources enow for a perpetual increaſe in happineſs, without any aſſiſtance from the ſenſation of future pain. This ſpeculation will probably appear before the public in due time, together with other obſervations relating

to

to the extenſion and application of this wonderfully ſimple theory of the mental affections.

12 Theſe conſiderations appear to me abundantly ſufficient to convince us, that even the unlimited benevolence of the author of nature is not affected by the partial evils to which we are ſubject. But ſtill it will be ſaid, that a Being of pure and perfect benevolence might have obviated this inconvenience, by a different original conſtitution of nature, in which evils might not have been neceſſary, not being of any uſe to us as ſuch.

13 But, I anſwer, this is more than we can pretend to ſay is even *poſſible*, or within the limits of infinite power itſelf; and there is this pretty good reaſon for preſuming that it is ſo, which is, that in preſent circumſtances we always ſee (wherever we can ſee enough to be in any meaſure judges) that the methods that are taken are the beſt for us, all other things connected with them being conſidered; and the ſame *diſpoſition* in our author to provide the beſt for us in one

caſe would lead him to provide the beſt for us in another; ſo that, if, *cæteris manentibus*, every thing is for the beſt, we may conclude that the *whole* is for the beſt; the diſpoſition of mind to make this proviſion being the very ſame in both caſes.

14 Suppoſing it poſſible, therefore, for the Divine Being to have created men with all the feelings and ideas that are acquired in the courſe of a painful and laborious life, ſince it muſt have been in violation of all *general laws*, we have reaſon to conclude that laws, or general methods of acting, are preferable to no laws at all; and that it is better, upon the whole, that the divine agency ſhould not be ſo very conſpicuous, as it muſt have been upon the plan of a conſtant and momentary interference.

15 It is plain there could be little room for the exerciſe of *wiſdom*, in God or man, if there had been no general laws. For the whole plan of nature, from which we infer deſign or wiſdom, is admirable, chiefly on account of its being a ſyſtem of wonderfully general and ſimple laws, ſo that innumerable

ends

ends are gained by the feweſt means, and the greateſt good produced with the leaſt poſſible evil. And the wiſdom and foreſight of man could have had no ſcope, if there had been no invariable plan of nature to be the object of his inveſtigation and ſtudy, by which to guide his conduct, and direct his expectations.

16 In compariſon with the ſolid advantages we derive from the exerciſe of our faculties on this plan of general laws, how trifling are thoſe that would accrue to us from even the frequent interruption, and much more from the total abrogation of them? What could we gain but that a child falling into the fire ſhould not be burned, or that a man falling from a precipice ſhould not be daſhed to pieces? But all the accidents that happen of this kind, and which our reaſon is given us to enable us to guard againſt, are ſurely not to be bought off at ſuch a price as this. How little do we ſuffer on the whole by accidents from *fire*, compared with the benefits we derive from it; and how much greater gainers are we ſtill on the balance by the great *law of gravitation*.

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¶ The advantage, if not the neceſſity, of general laws, is beſt ſeen in the conduct of a large family, of a ſchool, or of a community; becauſe the good of the whole muſt be conſulted in conjunction with that of each individual; and we often find it to be wiſe and right to ſuffer individuals to bring themſelves into difficulties, from which we would gladly relieve them, if we had not reſpect to others who are equally under our care. How often is a favourite child, or pupil, puniſhed, or an uſeful member of ſociety falſely convicted of a crime, ſuffered to die, rather than violate general rules, ſalutary to the whole. Now, as ſmall ſocieties cannot be governed without general rules, and particular inconveniencies; it may, for any thing that we know, be naturally impoſſible to govern the large ſociety of mankind without ſuch general laws, though attended with particular inconveniencies.

¶ If it be ſaid that the Divine Being might *conceal* his violation of the laws of nature for the benefit of individuals, I anſwer that thoſe individuals would, without a ſecond interference, loſe the benefit they would have derived

derived from their ſufferings as ſuch (teaching them caution, &c.) and if the Divine Being did this in all caſes, to prevent all evil, there would be no general laws at all; and who can direct him when to interfere, and when not? As to very rare caſes, it is poſſible, though I own not probable (becauſe it would imply a want of foreſight in the original plan) that the Divine Being does interfere in this inviſible manner.

If we conſider the human race as the moſt valuable of the divine productions on the face of the earth, and intellectual happineſs as the moſt valuable part of his happineſs; if the training of men to great elevation of thought, comprehenſion of mind, virtuous affections, and generous actions, be any object with the great Author of all things (and the good of the whole ſeems to require that there ſhould be a proportion of ſuch exalted beings) this world, with all its imperfections, as we think them, is perhaps the beſt poſſible ſchool in which they could be thus trained. How could we be taught compaſſion for others, without ſuffering ourſelves, and where

could the rudiments of the heroic virtues of fortitude, patience, clemency, &c. be acquired but in the ſchool of adverſity, in ſtruggling with hardſhips, and contending with oppreſſion, ingratitude, and other vices, moral evils as well as natural ones?

If we ſuppoſe theſe truly great minds formed here, as in a *nurſery*, for the purpoſe of future exiſtence, reſpecting their own happineſs, or that of others, the conſideration will furniſh another argument for the preſent ſtate of things. What evidence there is of this being the caſe we ſhall ſee hereafter.

Upon the whole, it is very poſſible, notwithſtanding ſome appearances to the contrary, that the affection of the univerſal parent to his offſpring may be even *boundleſs*, or, properly ſpeaking, *infinite*; and alſo that the actual happineſs of the whole creation may be conſidered as infinite, notwithſtanding all the partial evil there is in it. For if good prevail upon the whole, the creation being ſuppoſed infinite, happineſs will be infinitely extended; and in the eye of a being

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of perfect comprehenſion, ſuch as the Divine Being muſt be, capable of perceiving the balance of good only, it will be happineſs unmixed with miſery. Nay, ſuppoſing men (and it is of men only that I am now treating) to live for ever, if each be happy upon the whole, and eſpecially if the happineſs of each be conſtantly accelerated, each individual may be ſaid to be infinitely happy in the whole of his exiſtence; ſo that to the divine comprehenſion the whole will be happineſs *infinito-infinite*. See Dr. Hartley's admirable illuſtration of this ſubject, in the ſecond volume of his *Obſervations on Man*.

I am, &c.

LETTER VII.

The Evidence of the moral Government of the World, and the Branches of natural Religion.

DEAR SIR,

IF you will admit that I have proved to your ſatisfaction that there is a God, a firſt cauſe, poſſeſſed of infinite power, wiſ-

dom and goodneſs, or only of ſuch degrees of thoſe attributes as, in a popular ſenſe of the word, may be deemed infinite, that is, far exceeding our comprehenſion, nothing more will be requiſite to prove every moral perfection, and that we are under a proper *moral government*.

Juſtice, mercy, and veracity, with every thing elſe that is of a *moral nature*, are, in fact, and philoſophically conſidered, only modifications of benevolence. For a Being, ſimply and truly *benevolent*, will neceſſarily act according to what are called the rules of *juſtice*, *mercy*, and *veracity*; becauſe in no other way can he promote the good of ſuch moral agents, as are ſubject to his government. Even *juſtice* itſelf, which ſeems to be the moſt oppoſite to goodneſs, is ſuch a degree of ſeverity, or pains and penalties ſo inflicted, as will produce the beſt effect, with reſpect both to thoſe who are expoſed to them, and to others who are under the ſame government; or, in other words, that degree of evil which is calculated to produce the greateſt degree of good;

and if the punishment exceed this measure, if, in any instance, it be an *unnecessary*, or *useless suffering*, it is always censured as *cruelty*, and is not even called justice, but real injustice.

For the same reason, if, in any particular case, the strict execution of the law would do more harm than good, it is universally agreed that the punishment ought to be remitted, and then what we call *mercy*, or clemency, will take place; but it does not deserve the name of clemency, nor is it worthy of commendation as a *virtue*, but it is censured as a weakness, or something worse, if it be so circumstanced as to encourage the commission of crimes, and consequently make more suffering necessary in future. In short, a truly good and wise governor frames the whole of his administration with a view to the happiness of his subjects, or he will endeavour to produce the greatest sum of happiness with the least possible mixture of pain or misery.

But you will check me in the course of this argument, and say, that if moral go-

vernment be the neceſſary reſult of benevolence, we ought to perceive ſome traces of this moral government before we can admit the ſupreme Being to be benevolent, and that this ought to be the principal argument for his benevolence.

5 I acknowledge it, but at the ſame time I muſt obſerve that any independent evidence of benevolence, ſuch as I have produced, is a ſtrong proof, *a priori*, that there will be a moral government; becauſe, as I have juſt ſhewn, if benevolence be uniform and conſiſtent, it muſt produce moral government, where moral agents are concerned; ſo that, having this previous reaſon to expect a moral government, we ought to ſuppoſe that ſuch a government *does* exiſt, unleſs there be evident proof of the contrary. Becauſe if this proof be indiſputable, it muſt be concluded that the ſupreme Being is not benevolent, of which we are ſuppoſed to have already other independent evidence.

6 Now, the mere *delay of puniſhment*, which is all that we can alledge againſt the reality of a preſent moral government, is no evi-

dence

dence againſt it, ſo long as the offender is within the reach of juſtice; becauſe it may be an inſtance of the wiſdom and juſt diſcretion of a governor, to give all his ſubjects a ſufficient *trial*, and treat them according to their *general character*, allowing ſufficient time in which to form that character, rather than exact an immediate puniſhment for every particular offence.

7 It is no uncommon thing with *men* not to puniſh for the firſt offence, but to give room for amendment; and it may be the more expected of *God*, whoſe juſtice no criminal can finally eſcape, and whoſe penetration no artifice can impoſe upon. Had human magiſtrates more knowledge, and more power, they might, in that proportion, give greater ſcope to men to form, and to ſhew, their characters, by deferring to take cognizance of crimes. It is becauſe criminals may impoſe upon them by pretences of reformation, or eſcape from their hands, that it is, in general, wiſe in them to animadvert upon crimes without much delay, and with few exceptions.

For any thing that appears, therefore, the preſent ſtate of the world (notwithſtanding, in ſome reſpects, *all things fall alike to all*, and a viſible diſtinction is not always made between the righteous and the wicked; and even notwithſtanding the wicked may, in ſome caſes, derive an advantage from their vices) may perfectly correſpond to ſuch a ſtate of moral government as a Being of infinite wiſdom and power would exerciſe towards mankind. And if this only *may* be the caſe, any independent evidence of the divine benevolence ought to make us conclude that this *is* the caſe, and lead us to expect that, at a proper time (of which the Divine Being himſelf is the only judge) both the righteous and the wicked will meet with their juſt and full recompence.

But there is not wanting *independent*, and ſufficient evidence, of a moral government of the world, ſimilar to the independent evidence of the benevolence of its author. For, notwithſtanding what has been admitted above, reſpecting the promiſcuous diſtribution of happineſs and miſery in the world,

world, it is unqueſtionable, that virtue gives a man a better chance for happineſs than vice.

What happineſs can any man enjoy without *health*, and is not temperance favourable to health, and intemperance the bane of it? What are all the outward advantages of life without *peace of mind*; and whatever be the proximate cauſe of it, it is a fact, and therefore muſt have been the intention of our maker, that peace of mind is the natural companion of integrity and honour, and not of fraud and injuſtice. It is the fruit of benevolence, and of that courſe of conduct which ariſes from it, and by no means of malevolence. Do we not alſo ſee that a moderate competency, which is much more valuable than riches, is generally the reward of fidelity and induſtry, and that poſſeſſions acquired by diſhoneſt arts are very inſecure, if, on other accounts, a man could have any enjoyment of them. What but common obſervation has given riſe to the common proverb, that *honeſty is the beſt policy?*

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The beſt definition and criterion of virtue is, "that diſpoſition of mind, and that "courſe of conduct ariſing from it, which "is beſt calculated to promote a man's own "happineſs, and the happineſs of others "with whom he is connected;" and to prove any thing to be really and ultimately miſchievous, is the ſame thing as to prove it to be vicious and wrong. The rule of temperance is to eat and drink ſo as to lay a foundation for health, and conſequently enjoyment; and intemperance does not conſiſt in the pleaſure we receive from the gratification of our appetites, but in procuring momentary pleaſure with future and more laſting pain; in laying a foundation for diſeaſes, and thereby diſqualifying a man for enjoying life himſelf, or contributing to the happineſs of others who are dependent upon him. In the ſame manner we fix the boundaries of all the vices, and all the virtues. Virtue is, in fact, that which naturally produces the greateſt ſum of good, and vice is that which produces the greateſt ſum of evil.

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In ſhort, the virtuous man is he that acts with the greateſt wiſdom and comprehenſion of mind, having reſpect to what is future as well as what is preſent; and the vicious man is he that acts with the leaſt juſt prudence and foreſight, catching at preſent pleaſure and advantage, and neglecting what is future, though of more value to him. It cannot, therefore, but be, that virtue muſt, upon the whole, lead to happineſs, and vice to miſery; and ſince this ariſes from the conſtitution of nature, and of the world, it muſt have been the intention of the author of nature that it ſhould be ſo.

Alſo, as from the *general* benevolence of the deity we inferred his *infinite* benevolence, ſo from his general reſpect to virtue we may infer his ſtrict and invariable reſpect to it; and as it cannot but appear probable that partial evils muſt be admitted by an all-powerful, and certainly a benevolent Being, becauſe they may be, in a manner unknown to us, connected with, or productive of, good; ſo there is an equal probability that, in the adminiſtration of a Being of infinite power and

and wiſdom (and certainly a favourer of virtue, as of happineſs) all irregularities in the diſtribution of rewards and puniſhments are either only ſeemingly ſo, or merely temporary; and that, when the whole ſcheme ſhall be completed, they will appear to have been proper parts of the moſt perfect moral adminiſtration.

Since then it is a fact, that we are in a ſtate juſtly intitled to the appellation of *moral government*, (this being not only preſumed from the conſideration of the divine benevolence previouſly eſtabliſhed, but alſo deduced independently, from actual appearances) there muſt be a foundation for what may be termed *natural religion*; that is, there is a ſyſtem of *duty* to which we ought to conform, becauſe there are *rewards and puniſhments* that we have to expect.

Our duty with reſpect to *ourſelves* and *others* is, in general, ſufficiently obvious, becauſe it is, in fact, nothing more than to *feel*, and to *act*, as our own true and ultimate happineſs, in conjunction with that of others, requires. With reſpect to the *Di-*

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vine Being, we muſt be guided by analogies, which, however, are tolerably diſtinct.

Thus, if gratitude be due to human benefactors, it muſt be due in a greater degree to God, from whom we receive unſpeakably more then from man; and, in like manner, it muſt be concluded to be our duty to reverence him, to reſpect his authority, and to confide in the wiſdom and goodneſs of his providence. For ſince he made us, it muſt be evident that we are not beneath his notice and attention; and ſince all the laws of nature, to which we are ſubject, are his eſtabliſhment, nothing that befals us can be unforeſeen, or, conſequently, unintended by him. With this perſuaſion, we muſt ſee and reſpect the hand of God in every thing. And if every thing is as God intended it to be, it is the ſame thing to us whether this intention was formed the moment immediately preceding any particular event, or from all eternity.

If reverence, gratitude, obedience, and confidence, be our duty with reſpect to God (which we infer from the analogy of thoſe duties

duties to men) it is agreeable to the ſame analogy, that we *expreſs* theſe ſentiments in words; and this is done in the moſt natural manner, agreeably to the ſame analogy, in a direct *addreſs* to the Author of our being; ſo that the principles of natural religion, properly purſued, will lead us to *prayer*.

That we ſhould expreſs our reverence for God, our gratitude to him, and our confidence in him, is generally thought reaſonable; but it is ſaid that we are not authoriſed to *aſk* any thing of him. But even this is unavoidable; if we follow the analogy above-mentioned. Conſidering God as our governor, father, guardian, or protector, we cannot reſiſt the impulſe to apply to him in our difficulties, as to any other being or perſon, ſtanding in the ſame relation to us. Analogy ſets aſide all diſtinction in this caſe; and if the analogy itſelf be natural, it is itſelf a part of the conſtitution of nature, and, therefore, ſufficiently authoriſes whatever is agreeable to it.

It is no objection to the natural duty of prayer to God, that he is ſuppoſed to know

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our wants, and to be the beſt judge of the propriety of ſupplying them. For we ourſelves may have the ſame good diſpoſition towards our children, and yet ſee ſufficient reaſon for inſiſting upon their perſonal application to us, as an expreſſion of their obligation, and a neceſſary means of cultivating a due ſenſe of their relation to us, and dependence upon us.

The idea of every thing being *predetermined* from all eternity, is no objection to prayer, becauſe all *means* are appointed as well as *ends*; and, therefore, if prayer be in itſelf a proper means, the end to be obtained by it, we may be aſſured, will not be had without *this*, any more than without any other means, or neceſſary previous circumſtances. No man will refrain from plowing his ground becauſe God foreſees whether he will have a harveſt or not. It is ſufficient for us to know that there never has been, and therefore probably never will be, any harveſt without previous plowing. Knowing this, if we only have the deſire of harveſt,

plowing

plowing the ground, and every thing elſe that we know to be previouſly neceſſary to it, and to be *within our power*, will be done by us of courſe.

It is poſſible, however, that were we as perfect as our nature and ſtate will admit, having acquired all the comprehenſion of mind to which we can ever attain, and having a ſteady belief in the infinite wiſdom, power, and goodneſs of God, with a conſtant ſenſe of his preſence with us, and unremitted attention to us, our devotion might be nothing more than a deep *reverence* and joyful *confidence*, perſuaded that all the divine diſpoſals were right and kind; and in their calmer moments very excellent and good men *do* approach to this ſtate. They feel no occaſion to *aſk* for any thing, becauſe they feel *no want* of any thing. But the generality of mankind always, and the beſt of men not poſſeſſing themſelves at all times with equal tranquility, muſt, and will, acquieſce in a devotion of a leſs perfect form. And the Divine Being, knowing this imperfect ſtate

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of our nature, muſt *mean* that we ſhould act agreeably to it, and *require* of us expreſſions of devotion adapted to our imperfect ſtate.

This progreſs is alſo agreeable to the analogy of nature: for when our children are fully poſſeſſed of that affection for us, and confidence in us, which was the object and end of any formal preſcribed mode of addreſs, &c. we do not inſiſt upon the *form*. We are then ſatisfied with their experienced attachment to us, and make them equally the objects of our kind attention, whether they apply to us in form for what they want, or not.

In all this, you ſee, we muſt content ourſelves with following the beſt analogies we can find, and thoſe are clearly in favour of a *duty to God*, as well as to man, and for the ſame reaſon, a duty and a behaviour ſimilar to that which we acknowledge to be due to our parents, guardians, and friends, but differing in proportion to the infinite ſuperiority of the ſupreme Being to every inferior Being, and the infinitely greater magnitude of our obligations to him. Let us now ſee

whether there be any analogy, from the common courſe of nature, that can give us any inſight into the *extent* and *duration* of the ſyſtem of moral government under which we manifeſtly are. But this I ſhall reſerve for the ſubject of another letter. In the mean time,

I am,

Dear Sir, &c.

LETTER VIII.

Of the Evidence for the future Exiſtence of Man.

DEAR SIR,

I Have already obſerved that benevolence, once proved to be *real*, can hardly be conceived to be other than *boundleſs*; and this muſt be more eſpecially the caſe with the Supreme Being, who can have no rival, or be jealous of any Being whatever. Such

Beings

Beings as *we* are may really wiſh well to others, and yet may wiſh them only a *certain degree* of happineſs; but then the deſire of that limitation will be found, if it be examined, to be occaſioned by ſomething peculiar to our ſituation, as limited and imperfect Beings, and what can have no place with the Deity. His benevolence, if real, muſt, as we ſhould think, be boundleſs. He muſt, therefore, wiſh the greateſt good of his creation, and the limitation to the preſent *actual happineſs* of the univerſe muſt ariſe from *perfection of happineſs* being incompatible with the nature of created, and, conſequently, finite Beings, and with that mixture of pain, which may be really neceſſary, according to the beſt poſſible general conſtitution of nature, to promote this happineſs.

But pain, we have ſeen, tends to limit and exclude itſelf, and things are evidently in a progreſs to a better ſtate. There is ſome reaſon, therefore, to expect that this *melioration* will go on without limits. And as exact and equal government ariſes from perfect benevolence (and even, independent of

the arguments for benevolence, does take place in some degree) we cannot, as it should seem, but be led by this analogy to expect a more perfect retribution than we see to take place here, and, consequently, to look for a state where moral agents will find more exact rewards for virtue, and more ample punishments for vice than they meet with in this world. I do not say that the argument from these analogies is so strong as to produce a *confident expectation* of such a future state; but it certainly, in fact, produces a *wish* for it; and this wish itself, being produced by the analogy of nature, is some evidence of the thing wished for.

3 Other analogies, it is acknowledged, tend to damp this expectation. We see that men, whose powers of perception and thought depend upon the organized state of the brain, decay and die, exactly like plants, or the inferior animals, and we see no instance of any revival. But still, while there exists in nature a power unquestionably equal to their revival (for it is the power that actually brought them into being at first) the former

analogies

analogies may lead us to look for this future ſtate of more exact retribution, to which we ſee ſomething like a reference in this, and for a more copious diſplay of the divine goodneſs, even beyond the grave.

On ſome, eſpecially on perſons conſcious of great integrity, and of great ſufferings in conſequence of it, theſe analogies will make a greater impreſſion, will produce a more earneſt *longing*, and, conſequently, a ſtronger *faith*, than others will have; and the ſame perſons will, for the ſame reaſon, be affected by them differently at different times. This fluctuation, and degree of uncertainty, muſt make every rational Being, and eſpecially every good man, who rejoices in what he ſees of the works and government of God, earneſtly long for farther information on this moſt intereſting ſubject; and this farther information we may perhaps find the univerſal father has actually given us.

I think it of ſome importance to obſerve, that the degree of moral government under which we are (the conſtitution of nature evidently favouring a courſe of virtue, and

frowning upon a courſe of vice) is a *fact* independent of all reaſoning concerning the exiſtence of God himſelf, and, therefore, ought to determine the conduct of thoſe who are not ſatisfied with reſpect to the proof of the being and attributes of God, and even of thoſe who are properly *atheiſts*, believing that nothing exiſts beſides the world, or the univerſe, of which we ourſelves are a part.

Whether there be any *author of nature*, or not, there cannot be any doubt of there being *an eſtabliſhed courſe of nature*; and an atheiſt muſt believe it to be the more firmly eſtabliſhed, and ſee leſs proſpect of any change, from acknowledging no ſuperior Being capable of producing that change. If, therefore, the courſe of nature be actually in favour of virtue, it muſt be the intereſt and wiſdom of every human Being to be virtuous. And farther, if it be agreeable to the analogy of nature, independent of any conſideration of the author of it, that things are in an improving ſtate, and, conſequently, that there is a tendency to a more exact

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and equal retribution, it muſt produce an expectation that this courſe of nature will *go on* to favour virtue ſtill more; and, therefore, it may be within the courſe of nature that men, as *moral agents*, ſhould ſurvive the grave, or be *re-produced*, to enjoy the full reward of virtue, or to ſuffer the puniſhments due to their vices.

It is acknowledged that we have no idea *how* this can come to paſs, but neither have we, any knowledge how we, that is, the human ſpecies, came into being; ſo that, for any thing we know to the contrary, our *re-production* may be as much within the proper courſe of nature, as our original production; and, conſequently, nothing hinders but that our expectation of a more perfect ſtate of things, and a ſtate of more exact retribution, raiſed by the obſervation of the actual courſe of nature, may be fulfilled. There may, therefore, be *a future ſtate*, even though there be no God at all. That is, as it is certainly, and independently of all other conſiderations, our wiſdom to be virtuous in this life, it may be equally our

wiſdom to be virtuous with a view to a life to come. And, faint as this probability may be thought, it is however *ſomething*, and muſt add ſomething to the ſanctions of virtue. Let not atheiſts, therefore, think themſelves *quite ſecure* with reſpect to a future life. Things as extraordinary as this, eſpecially upon the hypotheſis of there being no God, have taken place, and therefore this, which is ſufficiently analogous to the reſt, *may* take place alſo.

Let any perſon only conſider attentively the meaneſt plant that comes in his way, and he cannot but diſcover a wonderful *extent of view* in the adaptation of every part of it to the reſt, as of the root to the ſtem, the ſtem to the leaf, the leaf to the flower, the flower to the fruit, the fruit to the ſeed, &c. &c. &c. He will alſo perceive as wonderful an adaptation of all theſe to the ſoil, and the climate; and to the deſtined duration mode and extent of propagation, &c. of the plant. He will alſo perceive a wonderful relation of one plant to another, with reſpect to ſimilarity of ſtructure, uſes, and

mutual

mutual ſubſerviency. He will perceive another relation that they bear to the animals that feed upon them, or, in any other reſpect, avail themſelves of them. In extending his reſearches, he will perceive an equal *extent of view* in the parts of the animal œconomy, their relation to the vegetable world, and to one another, as of the carnivorous to the graminivorous, &c. and of every thing belonging to them, to their rank, place, and uſe, in the ſyſtem of the world.

After this, let him conſider this world, that is, the earth, as part of a greater ſyſtem, (each part of which, probably, as perfect in its kind) with the probable relation of the ſolar ſyſtem itſelf to other ſyſtems in the viſible univerſe. And then, whether he ſuppoſe that there is any *author of nature*, or not, he muſt ſee that, *by ſome means or other*, nothing is ever wanting, however remote in time or place, to render every thing *complete in its kind*. And if his mind be ſufficiently impreſſed with theſe *facts*, and the conſideration of the many events that daily take place,

of

of which he could not have the leaſt previous expectation, and of the efficient or proximate cauſes of which he is wholly ignorant, and he will not think it impoſſible, that, if any other particular event, of whatever magnitude, even the re-production of the whole human race after a certain period, will make the ſyſtem *more complete*, even that event may take place, though he be ever ſo ignorant of the proximate cauſe of it. That there is both a *power* in nature, and an *extent of view*, abundantly adequate to it, if he have any knowledge of *actual exiſtence*, he muſt be ſatisfied. In proportion, therefore, to his idea of the *propriety* and *importance* of any future ſtate of things, in that proportion will be his *expectation* of it. Our ignorance of the *means* by which any particular future ſtate of things may be brought about, is balanced by our acknowledged ignorance of the means in other caſes, where the reſult is indiſputable; though we are continually advancing in the diſcovery of theſe means in our inveſtigation of the more general laws of nature.

A retro-

A retroſpective view to our former ignorance in other caſes will be uſeful to us here. Time was when the total ſolution of a piece of metal in a chymical menſtruum would ſeem to be as abſolute a *loſs* of it, as the diſſolution of a human body by putrefaction, and the recovery of it would have been thought as hopeleſs. And, antecedent to our knowledge of the courſe of nature, the burying of a ſeed in the earth would ſeem to have as little tendency to the re-production of the plant. Where there certainly exiſts a power equal to any production, or any event, any thing that is *poſſible in itſelf* may be, and the difference in *antecedent probability* is only that of greater and leſs.

I am, &c.

LETTER

LETTER IX.

An Examination of Mr. Hume's DIALOGUES ON NATURAL RELIGION.

DEAR SIR,

I Am glad to find that you think there is at leaſt ſome appearance of weight in what, at your requeſt, I have urged, in anſwer to the objections againſt the belief of a God and a providence; and I am confident the more attention you give to the ſubject, the ſtronger will thoſe arguments appear, and the more trifling and undeſerving of regard you will think the cavils of atheiſts, ancient or modern. You wiſh, however, to know diſtinctly what I think of *Mr. Hume's poſthumous Dialogues on Natural Religion*; becauſe, coming from a writer of ſome note, that work is frequently a topic of converſation in the ſocieties you frequent.

With reſpect to *Mr. Hume's metaphyſical writings* in general, my opinion is, that, on the

the whole, the world is very little the wiſer for them. For though, when the merits of any queſtion were on his ſide, few men ever wrote with more perſpicuity, the arrangement of his thoughts being natural, and his illuſtrations peculiarly happy; yet I can hardly think that we are indebted to him for the leaſt real advance in the knowledge of the human mind. Indeed, according to his own very frank confeſſion, his object was mere *literary reputation* *. It was not the *purſuit of truth*, or the advancement of virtue and happineſs; and it was much more eaſy to make a figure by diſturbing the ſyſtems of others, than by erecting any of his own. All ſchemes have their reſpective weak ſides, which a man who has nothing of his own to riſk may more eaſily find, and expoſe.

In many of his *Eſſays* (which, in general, are exceſſively wire-drawn) Mr. Hume ſeems to have had nothing in view but to *amuſe* his readers, which he generally does agree-

* See his Life, written by himſelf, p. 32, 33.

ably enough; propoſing doubts to received hypotheſes, leaving them without any ſolution, and altogether unconcerned about it. In ſhort, he is to be conſidered in theſe *Eſſays* as a mere *writer* or *declaimer*, even more than Cicero in his book of Tuſculan Queſtions.

He ſeems not to have given himſelf the trouble ſo much as to read *Dr. Hartley's Obſervations on Man*, a work which he could not but have heard of, and which it certainly behoved him to ſtudy. The doctrine of *aſſociation of ideas*, as explained and extended by Dr. Hartley, ſupplies materials for the moſt ſatisfactory ſolution of almoſt all the difficulties he has ſtarted, as I could eaſily ſhew if I thought it of any conſequence; ſo that to a perſon acquainted with this theory of the human mind, *Hume's Eſſays* appear the mereſt trifling. Compared with Dr. Hartley, I conſider Mr. Hume as not even a child.

Now, I will frankly tell you, that this laſt performance of Mr. Hume has by no means changed for the better the idea I had before formed

formed of him as a metaphyſical writer. The dialogue is ingenioufly and artfully conducted. Philo, who evidently ſpeaks the ſentiments of the writer, is not made to ſay all the good things that are advanced, his opponents are not made to ſay any thing that is very palpably abſurd, and every thing is made to paſs with great decency and decorum.

But though Philo, in the moſt intereſting part of the debate, advances nothing but common-place objections againſt the belief of a God, and hackneyed declamation againſt the plan of providence, his antagoniſts are ſeldom repreſented as making any ſatisfactory reply. And when, at the laſt, evidently to ſave appearances, he relinquiſhes the argument, on which he had expatiated with ſo much triumph, it is without alledging any ſufficient reaſon; ſo that his arguments are left, as no doubt the writer intended, to have their full effect on the mind of the reader. Alſo though the debate ſeemingly cloſes in favour of the theiſt, the victory is clearly on the ſide of the atheiſt.

atheiſt. I therefore ſhall not be ſurpriſed if this work ſhould have a conſiderable effect in promoting the cauſe of atheiſm, with thoſe whoſe *general turn of thinking*, and *habits of life*, make them no ill-wiſhers to that ſcheme.

To ſatisfy your wiſhes, I ſhall recite what I think has moſt of the appearance of ſtrength, or plauſibility, in what Mr. Hume has advanced on the atheiſtical ſide of the queſtion, though it will neceſſarily lead me to repeat ſome things that I have obſerved already; but I ſhall endeavour to do it in ſuch a manner, that you will not deem it quite idle and uſeleſs repetition.

With reſpect to the general argument for the being of God, from the marks of deſign in the univerſe, he ſays, p. 65, "Will any "man tell me, with a ſerious countenance, "that an orderly univerſe muſt ariſe from "ſome thought and art, like the human, "becauſe we have experience of it. To "aſcertain this reaſoning, it were requiſite "that we had experience of the origin of "worlds, and it is not ſufficient, ſurely, that

"we

" we have ſeen ſhips and cities ariſe from " human art and contrivance."

Now, if it be admitted that there are marks of deſign in the univerſe, as numberleſs fitneſſes of things to things prove beyond all diſpute, is it not a neceſſary conſequence, that if it had a cauſe at all, it muſt be one that is capable of deſign? Will any perſon ſay that an eye could have been conſtructed by a Being who had no knowledge of optics, who did not know the nature of light, or the laws of refraction? And muſt not the univerſe have had a cauſe, as well as any thing elſe, that is finite and incapable of comprehending itſelf?

We might juſt as reaſonably ſay, that any particular ſhip, or city, any particular horſe, or man, had nothing exiſting ſuperior to it, as that the viſible univerſe had nothing ſuperior to it, if the univerſe be no more capable of comprehending itſelf than a ſhip, or a city, a horſe, or a man. There can be no charm in the words *world* or *univerſe*, ſo that they ſhould require no cauſe when they ſtand in preciſely the ſame predicament with

other things that evidently *do* require a ſuperior cauſe, and could not have exiſted without one.

All that Mr. Hume ſays on the difficulty of ſtopping at the idea of an uncauſed Being, is on the ſuppoſition that this uncauſed Being is a *finite one*, incapable of comprehending itſelf, and, therefore, in the ſame predicament with a ſhip or a houſe, a horſe or a man, which it is impoſſible to conceive to have exiſted without a ſuperior cauſe. "How ſhall we ſatisfy ourſelves," ſays he, p. 93, &c. "concerning the cauſe of that "Being whom you ſuppoſe the author of "nature.—If we ſtop and go no farther, "why go ſo far, why not ſtop at the mate-"rial world. How can we ſatisfy ourſelves "without going on in infinitum.—By ſup-"poſing it to contain the principle of order "within itſelf, we really aſſert it to be God, "and the ſooner we arrive at that Divine "Being, ſo much the better. When you "go one ſtep beyond the mundane ſyſtem, "you only excite an inquiſitive humour, "which it is impoſſible ever to ſatisfy."

It is very true, that no perſon can ſatisfy himſelf with going backwards *in infinitum* from one thing that requires a ſuperior cauſe, to another that equally requires a ſuperior cauſe. But any perſon may be ſufficiently ſatisfied with going back through finite cauſes as far as he has evidence of the exiſtence of intermediate finite cauſes; and then (ſeeing that it is abſurd to go on *in infinitum* in this manner) to conclude that, whether he can comprehend it or not, there *muſt* be ſome *uncauſed intelligent Being*, the original and deſigning cauſe of all other Beings. For otherwiſe, what we *ſee* and *experience* could not have exiſted. It is true that we cannot conceive *how* this ſhould be, but we are able to acquieſce in this ignorance, becauſe there is no *contradiction* in it.

He ſays, p. 15, "Motion, in many inſtances from gravity, from elaſticity, from electricity, begins in matter without any known voluntary agent; and to ſuppoſe always in theſe caſes an unknown voluntary agent, is mere hypotheſis, and hypotheſis attended with no advantage." He

alſo ſays, p. 118, "Why may not motion "have been propagated by impulſe through "all eternity?"

I will admit that the powers of gravity, elaſticity, and electricity, might have been in bodies from all eternity, without any ſuperior cauſe, if the bodies in which we find them were capable of knowing that they had ſuch powers, of that *deſign* which has proportioned them to one another, and of combining them in the wonderful and uſeful manner in which they are actually proportioned and combined in nature. But when I ſee that they are as evidently incapable of this as I am of properly producing a plant or an animal, I am under a neceſſity of looking for a higher cauſe; and I cannot reſt till I come to a Being *eſſentially different* from all viſible Beings whatever, ſo as not to be in the predicament that they are in, of requiring a ſuperior cauſe. Alſo, if motion could have been in the univerſe without any cauſe, it muſt have been in conſequence of bodies being poſſeſſed of the power of *gravity*, &c. from eternity, without a cauſe.

But

But as they could not have had thoſe powers without communication from a ſuperior and intelligent Being, capable of proportioning them, in the exact and uſeful manner in which they are poſſeſſed, the thing is manifeſtly *impoſſible*.

What Mr. Hume ſays with reſpect to the *origin of the world* in the following paragraph, which I think unworthy of a philoſopher, and miſerably trifling on ſo ſerious a ſubject, goes intirely upon the idea of the ſupreme cauſe reſembling ſuch beings as do themſelves require a ſuperior cauſe, and not (which, however, *muſt* be the caſe) a Being that can have no ſuperior in wiſdom or power. I, therefore, think it requires no particular animadverſion.

"Many worlds," he ſays, p. 106, "might "have been botched and bungled through-"out an eternity ere this ſyſtem was ſtruck "out, much labour loſt, many fruitleſs "trials made, and a ſlow, but continued "improvement, carried on during infinite "ages in the art of world making."

"A man who follows your hypotheſis," p. 111, "is able perhaps to aſſert, or con-"jecture, that the univerſe ſome time aroſe "from ſomething like deſign; but beyond "that poſition he cannot aſcertain one ſingle "circumſtance, and is left afterwards to fix "every point of his theology by the utmoſt "licence of fancy and hypotheſis. This "world, for ought we know, is very faulty "and imperfect, compared to a ſuperior "ſtandard, and was only the firſt rude eſſay "of ſome infant deity, who afterwards aban-"doned it, aſhamed of his own performance. "It is the work only of ſome dependent "inferior deity, and is the object of deri-"ſion to his ſuperiors. It is the produc-"tion of old age and dotage, in ſome ſuper-"annuated deity, and ever ſince his death "has run on at adventures, from the firſt "impulſe and active force, which it re-"ceived from him."

In reading *Mr. Hume's life*, written by himſelf, one might be ſurpriſed to find no mention of a *God*, or of a *providence*, which conducted him through it; but this cannot

be

be any longer wonderful, when we find that, for any thing he certainly believed to the contrary, he himſelf might be the moſt conſiderable Being in the univerſe. His maker, if he had any, might have been either a careleſs playful infant, a trifling forgetful dotard, or was, perhaps, dead and buried, without leaving any other to take care of his affairs. All that he believed of his maker was, that he was capable of *ſomething like deſign*, but of his own comprehenſive intellectual powers he could have no doubt.

Neither can we think it at all extraordinary that Mr. Hume ſhould have recourſe to *amuſing books* in the laſt period of his life, when he conſidered the author of nature himſelf as never having had any ſerious object in view, and when he neither left any thing behind him, nor had any thing before him, that was deſerving of his care. How can it be ſuppoſed that the man, who ſcrupled not to ridicule his maker, ſhould conſider the human race, or the world, in any other light than as objects of ridicule, or pity. And well ſatisfied might he be to

have been so fortunate in his passage through the world, and in his easy escape out of it, when it was deserted by its maker, and was continually exposed to some unforeseen and dreadful catastrophe. How poor a consolation, however, must have been his *literary fame*, with such gloomy prospects as these!

What Mr. Hume says with respect to the deficiency in the proof of the *proper infinity* of the divine attributes, and of a probable *multiplicity of deities*, all goes on the same idea, viz. that the ultimate cause of the universe is such a Being as must himself require a superior cause; whereas, nothing can be more evident, how incomprehensible soever it may be, than that the Being which has existed from eternity, and is the cause of all that does exist, must be one that *cannot* have a superior, and therefore must be infinite in knowledge and power, and consequently, as I have endeavoured to shew before, can be but *one*.

"As the cause," he says, p. 104, "ought "only to be proportioned to the effect, and "the effect, so far as it falls under our cog-

"nizance,

"nizance, is not infinite, what pretenſions "have we to aſcribe that attribute to the "Divine Being? — By ſharing the work "among ſeveral we may ſo much farther "limit the attributes of each, and get rid "of that extenſive power and knowledge "which muſt be ſuppoſed in one deity." — This I think unworthy of a philoſopher on ſo grave and intereſting a ſubject.

It is owing to the ſame inattention to this one conſideration, that, in order to get rid of the idea of a ſupreme intelligent cauſe of all things, Mr. Hume urges the ſuperior probability of the univerſe reſembling a *plant*, or an *animal*. "If the univerſe," ſays he, p. 129, "bears a greater likeneſs to "animal bodies, and to vegetables, than to "the works of human art, it is more pro- "bable that its cauſe reſembles the cauſe of "the former than that of the latter; and "its origin ought rather to be aſcribed to "generation, or vegetation, than to reaſon "or deſign."

On this, Demea, the orthodox ſpeaker, very properly obſerves, p. 137, "Whence "could

"could arise so wonderful a faculty but "from design, or how can order spring from "any thing which perceives not that order "which it bestows." In reply to which Philo contents himself with saying, ib. "A "tree bestows order, and organization, on "that tree which springs from it, without "knowing the order; an animal, in the "same manner, on its offspring," and p. 140, "Judging by our limited and imperfect ex- "perience, generation has some privileges "above reason; for we see every day the "latter to arise from the former, never the "former from the latter."

Manifestly unsatisfactory as this reply is, nothing is advanced in answer to it by either of the other disputants. But it is obvious to remark, that, if an animal has marks of design in its construction, a design which itself cannot comprehend, it is hardly possible for any person to imagine that it was originally produced without a power superior to itself, and capable of comprehending its structure, though he was not himself present at the original formation of it, and

there-

therefore, could not see it. Can we possibly believe that any particular *horse* that we know, originated without a superior cause? equally impossible is it to believe, that the *species of horses* should have existed without a superior cause.

How little then does it avail Mr. Hume to say, p. 135, that "reason, instinct, gene-"ration, vegetation, are similar to each "other, and the causes of similar effects;" as if *instinct*, *generation*, and *vegetation*, did not necessarily imply *design*, or reason, as the cause of them. He might with equal reason have placed other powers in nature, as *gravity*, *elasticity*, &c. in the same rank with these; whereas all these must equally have proceeded from reason, or design, and could not have had any existence independent of it. For design is conspicuous in all those powers, and especially in the proportion and distribution of them.

Pursuing the analogy of plants and animals, he says, p. 152, "In like manner as a "tree sheds its seeds into the neighbouring "fields, and produces other trees; so the "great

" great vegetable the world, or this pla-
" netary ſyſtem, produces within itſelf cer-
" tain ſeeds, which being ſcattered into the
" ſurrounding chaos, vegetate into new
" worlds. A comet, for inſtance, is the
" ſeed of a world, and after it has been fully
" ripened by paſſing from ſun to ſun, and
" ſtar to ſtar, it is at laſt toſſed into the un-
" formed elements, which every where ſur-
" round this univerſe, and immediately
" ſprouts up into a new ſyſtem."

" Or, if we ſhould ſuppoſe this world to
" be an *animal*, a comet is the *egg* of this
" animal; and in like manner as an oſtrich
" lays its egg in the ſand, which, without
" any farther care, hatches the egg, and pro-
" duces a new animal; ſo ——— Does not
" a plant or an animal," p. 134, " which
" ſprings from vegetation or generation, bear
" a ſtronger reſemblance to the world, than
" does any artificial machine, which ariſes
" from reaſon and deſign?"

Had any friend of religion advanced an idea ſo completely abſurd as this, what would not Mr. Hume have ſaid to turn it in-

to

to ridicule. With juſt as much probability might he have ſaid that Glaſgow grew from a ſeed yielded by Edinburgh, or that London and Edinburgh, marrying, by natural generation, produced York, which lies between them. With much more probability might he have ſaid that *pamphlets* are the productions of large *books*, that *boats* are young *ſhips*, and that *piſtols* will grow into great *guns*; and that either there never were any firſt towns, books, ſhips, or guns, or that, if there were, they had no makers.

How it could come into any man's head to imagine that a thing ſo complex as this world, conſiſting of land and water, earths and metals, plants and animals, &c. &c. &c. ſhould produce a ſeed or egg, containing within it the elements of all its innumerable parts, is beyond my power of conception.

What muſt have been that man's knowledge of philoſophy and nature, who could ſuppoſe for a moment, that a comet could poſſibly be the ſeed of a world? Do comets ſpring from worlds, carrying with them the ſeeds of all the plants, &c. that they contain?

tain? Do comets travel from ſun to ſun, or from ſtar to ſtar? By what force are they toſſed into the *unformed elements*, which Mr. Hume ſuppoſes every where to ſurround the univerſe? What are thoſe elements? and what evidence has he of their exiſtence? or, ſuppoſing the comet to arrive among them, whence could ariſe its power of vegetating into a new ſyſtem?

What Mr. Hume objects to the arguments for the *benevolence* of the Deity is ſuch mere cavilling, and admits of ſuch eaſy anſwers, that I am ſurpriſed that a man whoſe ſole object was even *literary reputation* ſhould have advanced it.

"The courſe of nature, p. 186, "tends "not to human or animal felicity, therefore "it is not eſtabliſhed for that purpoſe." He might as well have ſaid that *health* is not agreeable to the courſe of nature, as that enjoyment and *happineſs* is not, ſince the one is the neceſſary conſequence of the other. "It is contrary," he ſays, in fact, p. 193, "to every one's feeling and experience to "maintain a continued exiſtence in this

"world

"world to be eligible and desirable. It is "contrary to an authority so established as "nothing can subvert." And yet almost all animals and all men *do* desire life, and, according to his own account, his own life was a singularly happy and enviable one.

"You must prove," p. 195, "these "pure unmixed and uncontrollable attri- "butes from the present mixed and confused "phenomena, and from these alone: a hope- "ful undertaking." If *evil* was not, in a thousand ways, necessarily connected with, and subservient to *good*, the undertaking would be hopeless, but not otherwise.

"It seems plainly possible," p. 205, "to "carry on the business of life without any "pain. Why then is any animal ever ren- "dered susceptible of such a sensation?" But pain, *as such*, we have seen to be excellently useful, as a guard against more pain, and greater evils, and also as an element of future happiness; and no man can pretend to say that the same end *could* have been attained by any other means.

"The

"The conduct of the world by general "laws," p. 206, "ſeems no wiſe neceſſary to "a very perfect being." But without general laws there could have been little or no room for *wiſdom*, in God or man; and what kind of happineſs could we have had without the exerciſe of our rational powers. To have had any *intellectual enjoyments* in thoſe circumſtances (and the ſenſual are of little value in compariſon with them) we muſt have been Beings of quite another kind than we are at preſent, probably much inferior to what we are now.

"Almoſt all the moral as well as natural "evils of human life," p. 213, "ariſe from "*idleneſs*; and were our ſpecies, by the ori-"ginal conſtitution of their frame, exempt "from this vice, or infirmity, the perfect "cultivation of the land, the improvements "of arts and manufactures, the exact execu-"tion of every office and duty, immediately "follows, and men at once may fully reach "that ſtate of ſociety which is ſo imperfectly "attained by the beſt regulated government.

"But

"But as induſtry is a power, and the moſt "valuable of any, nature ſeems determined, "ſuitable to her uſual maxims, to beſtow it "on men with a very ſparing hand." And yet this writer can ſay, p. 259, that "no "ſtate of mind is ſo happy as the calm and "equable." But would not more induſtry, and *activity*, neceſſarily diſturb this calm and happy temperament, and be apt to produce quarrels, and, conſequently, more unhappineſs?

"I am ſceptic enough," he ſays, p. 219, "to allow that the bad appearances, not-"withſtanding all my reaſonings, may be "compatible with ſuch attributes as you "ſuppoſe; but ſurely they can never prove "ſuch attributes." But if preſent appearances prove *real benevolence*, I think they will go very near to prove *unbounded* benevolence, for reaſons that I have alleged before, and which I ſhall not repeat here.

It is pretty clear to me, that Mr. Hume was not ſufficiently acquainted with what has been already advanced by thoſe who have written on the ſubject of the being and attri-

butes of God. Otherwiſe he either would not have put ſuch weak arguments into the mouth of his favourite Philo, or would have put better anſwers into thoſe of his opponents. It was, I imagine, his diſlike of the ſubject that made him overlook ſuch writers, or give but little attention to them; and I think this conjecture concerning his averſion to the ſubject the better founded, from his ſaying, p. 259, that "there is a "gloom and melancholy remarkable in all "devout people."

No perſon really acquainted with true devotion, or thoſe who were poſſeſſed with it, could have entertained ſuch an opinion. What Mr. Hume had ſeen, muſt have been ſome miſerably low ſuperſtition, or wild enthuſiaſm, things very remote from the calm and ſedate, but chearful ſpirit of rational devotion.

Had he conſidered the nature of true devotion, he muſt have been ſenſible that the charge of gloom and melancholy can leaſt of all apply to it. Gloom and melancholy certainly belong to the ſyſtem of atheiſm, which

which entirely precludes the pleasing ideas of a benevolent author of nature, and of a wise plan of providence, bringing good out of all the evil we experience; which cuts off the consoling intercourse with an invisible, but omnipresent and almighty protector and friend; which admits of no settled provision for our happiness, even in this life, and closes the melancholy scene, such as Mr. Hume himself describes it, with a total annihilation.

Is it possible to draw a more gloomy and dispiriting picture of the system of the universe than Mr. Hume himself has drawn in his tenth dialogue? No melancholy religionist ever drew so dark a one. Nothing in the whole system pleases him. He finds neither *wisdom*, nor *benevolence*. Speaking on the supposition of God being omnipotent and omniscient, he says, p. 185, "His "power we allow infinite; whatever he "wills is executed; but neither man nor "any other animal is happy; therefore he "does not will their happiness. His wis-"dom is infinite; he is never mistaken in

"choosing the means to any end; but the "courſe of nature tends not to human or "animal felicity; therefore it is not eſta-"bliſhed for that purpoſe."

"Look round the univerſe," ſays he, p. 219, "what an immenſe profuſion of be-"ings, animated and organized, ſenſible and "active. You admire this prodigious va-"riety and fecundity. But inſpect a little "more narrowly theſe living exiſtences, the "only beings worth regarding. How hoſtile "and deſtructive to each other. How in-"ſufficient all of them for their own hap-"pineſs. How contemptible, or odious, to "the ſpectator. The whole preſents no-"thing but the idea of a blind nature, im-"pregnated by a great vivifying principle, "and pouring forth from her lap, without "diſcernment, or parental care, her maimed "and abortive children."

Compare this with the language of the pious writers of the ſcriptures. "Thou art "good and doeſt good. The Lord is good "to all, and his tender mercies are over all "his works. The earth is full of the good-

" neſs of the Lord. The eyes of all wait " upon thee, and thou giveſt them their " meat in due ſeaſon. Thou openeſt thine " hand, and ſatisfieſt the deſires of every " living thing. The Lord reigneth: let " the earth rejoice, let the inhabitants of " the iſles be glad thereof. Clouds and " darkneſs are round about him, righteouſ- " neſs and judgment are the habitation of " his throne."

In the ſcriptures the Divine Being is repreſented as " encouraging us to caſt all our " care upon him who careth for us." The true chriſtian is exhorted to *rejoice evermore*, and eſpecially to *rejoice in tribulation*, and perſecution for righteouſneſs ſake. Death is ſo far from being a frightful and diſguſting thing, that he triumphs in it, and over it. *O death, where is thy ſting? O grave, where is thy victory?*

Would any perſon heſitate about chuſing to *feel* as theſe writers felt, or as Mr. Hume muſt have done. With his views of things, the calmneſs and compoſure with which, he ſays, he faced death, though infinitely ſhort of the *joyful expectation* of the chriſtian, could

not have been any thing but affectation. If, however, with his prospects he really was as calm, placid, and chearful, as he pretends, with little reason can he charge any set of *speculative principles* with a tendency to produce gloom and melancholy. If *his* system did not produce this disposition, it never can be in the power of *system* to do it.

Notwithstanding I have differed so much from Mr. Hume with respect to the principles of his treatise, we shall, in words, at least, agree in our conclusion. For though I think the being of a God, and his general benevolence and providence, to be sufficiently demonstrable, yet so many cavils may be started on the subject, and so much still remains, that a rational creature must wish to be informed of concerning his maker, his duty here, and his expectations hereafter, that what Mr. Hume said by way of cover and irony, I can say with great seriousness, and I do not wish to say it much otherwise, or better.

"The most natural sentiment," he says, p. 363, "which a well-disposed mind will "feel on this occasion, is a longing desire

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"and expectation, that heaven would be "pleaſed to diſſipate, at leaſt alleviate, this "profound ignorance, by affording ſome "more particular revelation to mankind, "and making diſcoveries of the nature, at- "tributes, and operation of the divine ob- "ject of our faith. A perſon ſeaſoned with "a juſt ſenſe of the imperfection of natural "reaſon will fly to *revealed truth* with the "greateſt avidity. To be a philoſophical "ſceptic is, in a man of letters, the firſt and "moſt eſſential ſtep towards being a ſound "believing chriſtian."

I am, &c.

LETTER X.

An Examination of Mr, Hume's Eſſay on a particular Providence, and a Future State.

DEAR SIR,

YOU tell me you have been a good deal ſtaggered with the eleventh of Mr. Hume's *Philoſophical Eſſays*, on a *particular*

providence, and a *future ſtate*, thinking his reaſoning, if not concluſive, yet ſo plauſible, as to be well entitled to a particular reply. I ſhall, therefore, give it as much conſideration as I flatter myſelf, after what I have already advanced on the ſame ſubject, you will think ſufficient.

In the character of an Epicurean philoſopher, addreſſing an Athenian audience, he ſays, p. 216, "Allowing the gods to be the "authors of the exiſtence, or order, of the "univerſe, it follows, that they poſſeſs that "preciſe degree of power, intelligence, and "benevolence, which appear in their work-"manſhip. But nothing farther can be "proved, except we call in the aſſiſtance of "exaggeration and flattery, to ſupply the "place of argument and reaſon." He farther ſays, p. 223, "You have no reaſon to "give diſtributive juſtice any particular ex-"tent, but only ſo far as you ſee it at pre-"ſent extend itſelf."

This is the ſum of his argument, which he has only repeated in his poſthumous Dialogues, and the reaſoning of which you will find

find obviated in the preceding Letters. He himself makes a friend, whom he introduces as discussing the question with him, reply to it, that intelligence once proved, from our own experience and observation, we are necessarily carried beyond what we have observed, to such unseen consequences, as we naturally expect from such intelligence, in similar cases.

"If you saw," says he, p. 225, "a half "finished building, surrounded with heaps "of bricks, and stones, and mortar, and all "the instruments of masonry, could you "not infer from the effect, that it was a "work of design and contrivance, and could "you not return again from this inferred "cause, to infer new additions to the effect, "and conclude that the building would "soon be finished, and receive all the far-"ther improvements that art could bestow "upon it? Why then do you refuse to "admit the same mode of reasoning with "regard to the order of nature? &c."

This reply appears to me to be satisfactory. But Mr. Hume refuses to acquiesce in

in it, on account of a ſuppoſed total *diſſimilarity* between the Divine Being and other intelligent agents, and of our more perfect knowledge of man than of God. The ſubſtance of his anſwer is, that we know man from various of his productions, and, therefore, from this experience of his conduct, can foretel what will be the reſult of thoſe of his works of which we ſee only a part. "Whereas the deity," he ſays, p. 227, "is "known to us only by his productions, and "is a ſingle Being in the univerſe, not com- "prehended under any ſpecies or genus, "from whoſe experienced attributes or qua- "lities we can, by analogy, infer any attri- "bute or quality in him. As the univerſe "ſhews wiſdom and goodneſs, we infer "wiſdom and goodneſs. As it ſhews a "particular degree of theſe perfections, we "infer a particular degree of them, preciſely "adapted to the effects we examine. But "farther attributes, and farther degrees of "the ſame attributes, we can never be au- "thoriſed to infer, or ſuppoſe, by any rules "of juſt reaſoning." He therefore ſays,

p. 230,

p. 230, "No new fact can be inferred from "the religious hypothesis, no event foreseen "or foretold, no reward or punishment ex- "pected or dreaded, beyond what is already "known by practice and observation."

But if the deity be an intelligent and designing cause (of which the universe furnishes abundant evidence) he is not, in Mr. Hume's sense, an *unique*, of a genus or species by himself; but is to be placed in the general *class* of *intelligent and designing agents*, though infinitely superior to all others of that kind; so that, by Mr. Hume's own concession, we are not without some *clue* to guide us in our inquiries concerning the probable tendencies and issues of what we see.

Besides, admitting the deity to be an *unique* with respect to intelligence, it is not with *one* of his productions only that we are acquainted. We see innumerable of them; and as far as our experience goes, we see that all of them advance to some state of perfection. Properly speaking, nothing is left *unfinished*. It is true that particular plants,

plants and animals perish before they arrive at this state, but this is not the case with the *species*; and all individuals perish in consequence of some *general laws*, calculated for the good of the whole species, that is, of the greater part of the individuals of which it consists. Consequently, without regard to the productions of other intelligent agents, we are not destitute of *analogies*, from which to infer a future better state of things, in which there may be a fuller display of the divine attributes, both of justice and benevolence.

On the whole, therefore, if we see things to be in a progress to a better state, we may reasonably conclude that the melioration will continue to proceed, and, either equably or accelerated, as we have hitherto observed it. Whatever be the *final object* of a work of design, yet, from what we know of such works, we can generally form a tolerable guess whether they be *finished* or *unfinished*, and whether any scheme be near its beginning, its middle, or its termination. We are, therefore, by no means precluded from

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all reaſoning concerning a future ſtate of things by the conſideration of the infinite ſuperiority of the author of the ſyſtem of the univerſe to all other intelligent beings. Notwithſtanding his ſuperiority to any of them, he may be ſaid to be *one of them*, and, without any information from the ſcriptures, we might have diſcovered that in this ſenſe, at leaſt, *in the image of God has he made man*. Or, though God ſhould not be conſidered as of the ſame claſs with any of his creatures, his productions, having the ſame author, ſupply abundance of analogies among themſelves.

In the ſame manner, the benevolence of the deity (which, in this place, Mr. Hume does not deny, but ſuppoſe) being ſimply admitted, we are at liberty to reaſon concerning it, as well as concerning the benevolence of any other Being whatever. And therefore if, in any nearly parallel caſe, we can ſee no reaſon why benevolence ſhould be limited, or why a *leſs* and not a *greater* degree of good ſhould be intended, it muſt appear probable to us, that the greateſt is

intended;

intended; though, for ſufficient, but unknown reaſons, it cannot take place at preſent. Juſt as, if we are once ſatisfied that any particular *parent* has a juſt affection for his child, we conclude that, though he does not put him into immediate poſſeſſion of every thing that he has in his power to beſtow upon him, it is becauſe he is perſuaded that, for the preſent, it would not be for his advantage; but that, in due time (of which we alſo naturally preſume the parent himſelf to be the beſt judge) he will do much more for him, even all that his knowledge and ability can enable him to do. And though we may preſume envy and jealouſy to prevent this in natural parents, we cannot poſſibly ſuppoſe any thing of this kind to affect the *univerſal parent*, becauſe we cannot imagine any interference of intereſt between this parent and his offspring.

We always argue in the ſame manner concerning the conduct of a *governor*. If we are once fully ſatisfied with reſpect to his *love of juſtice*, and have alſo no doubt of his *wiſdom* and *power*, we immediately conclude,

clude, that every incorrigible criminal in his dominions will be properly punished; and though, for the present, many criminals walk at large, we conclude that their conduct is duly attended to, and that their future treatment will be made to correspond to it.

In like manner, if the present state of things bear the aspect of a scene of *distributive justice*, it may reasonably be considered as only the beginning of a scheme of more exact and impartial administration; so that, in due time, virtue will be more adequately rewarded, and vice more exemplarily punished, than we now see it to be. Every thing, therefore, that I have advanced on this subject in the preceding *Letters* may be perfectly well founded, notwithstanding this particular objection of Mr. Hume, and notwithstanding the great stress he lays upon it, both in this work, and in his *posthumous Dialogues*.

I am,

Dear Sir, &c.

LETTER

LETTER XI.

Of the SYSTEME DE LA NATURE.

DEAR SIR,

IT would be tireſome to you, as well as irkſome to myſelf, to go over *all* the atheiſtical writers that have been admired in their time, but there is one work much more celebrated abroad than that of Mr. Hume will probably ever be with us, that you wiſh me not to paſs unnoticed. This is the *Syſteme de la Nature.*

After what I have already obſerved in my ſix firſt letters, and my animadverſions on Mr. Hume's Dialogues, &c. it will hardly be in my power to ſelect any thing from this work that I have not noticed already. However, as this performance is conſidered by many perſons as a kind of *bible of atheiſm*, and the manner in which it is written, though far from being cloſely argumentative, is often excellent in the mode of *declamation*,

mation, and the writer is much more bold and unreſerved than Mr. Hume, I ſhall make ſuch extracts as I am confident you will acknowledge contain the eſſence of his argument, and will be, at the ſame time, a pretty juſt ſpecimen of the compoſition of the whole, with ſhort remarks.

This writer admits of nothing but what is the object of our ſenſes, and, in the common ſenſe of the word, *material*; and concerning the origin of matter, and all the preſent laws of it, he expreſſes himſelf as follows:

"If we aſk whence came matter," p. 29, "we ſay it has exiſted always. If we be "aſked whence came motion in matter; we "anſwer that, for the ſame reaſon, it muſt "have been in motion from all eternity; "ſince motion is a neceſſary conſequence "of its exiſtence, of its eſſence, and its pri-"mitive properties, ſuch as extenſion, gra-"vity, impenetrability, figure, &c.—Theſe "elements," p. 32, "which we never find "perfectly pure, being continually in action "on one another, always acting and re-"acting, always combining and ſeparating,

"attracting and repelling, are sufficient to "explain the formation of all the Beings "that we see. They are alternately causes "and effects; and thus form a vast circle "of generations and destructions, combina-"tions and decompositions, which never "could have had any beginning, and can "never have an end. To go higher," p. 32, 33, "for the principle of action in "matter, and the origin of things, is only "removing the difficulty, and wholly with-"drawing it from the examination of our "senses."

I will acknowledge with this writer, that matter cannot exist without *powers*, as those of attraction, repulsion, &c. more or less modified, as in the form of gravity, elasticity, electricity, &c. for take away all the powers, that is, all the *properties* of matter, and the *substance* itself vanishes from our idea. Consequently, if matter has been from eternity, these powers, and the motions which are the effects of them, must also have been from eternity. But then, in the *adjustment* of these various powers, and, consequently,

conſequently, in *imparting* them, there muſt evidently have been a knowledge, comprehenſion, and foreſight, of which the bodies poſſeſſing, and ſubject to, thoſe laws are altogether incapable. I therefore conclude with certainty, that a Being ſuperior to every thing that is the object of our ſenſes, muſt have imparted thoſe powers and have adjuſted them to their proper uſes; that is, that he muſt have *created matter itſelf*, which could have no exiſtence without its powers. I am unable to account for what is *viſible* without having recourſe to a power that is *inviſible*; and this inviſible power I diſtinguiſh by the name of God.

"What does the word God," ſays he, vol. 2. p. 191, "mean, but the impene-" trable cauſe of the effects which aſtoniſh "us, and which we cannot explain. In "this God," vol. 2. p. 109, "nothing is "found but a vain phantom, ſubſtituted for "*the energy of nature*, which men are always "determined to miſtake. Men have filled "nature with ſpirits," p. 110, "becauſe "they have been almoſt always ignorant of

"true cauſes. For want of knowing the "force of nature, they have thought it to "be animated by a great ſpirit. For want "of knowing the energy of the human "machine, they have ſuppoſed *that*, in like "manner, to be animated by a ſpirit; ſo "that we ſee the word *ſpirit* means nothing "but the unknown cauſe of the pheno-"mena that we cannot explain in a na-"tural manner."

To this I can only ſay that, if nothing that is viſible *can* account for what I ſee, I muſt neceſſarily have recourſe to ſomething that is inviſible. Juſt as if I hear a voice which, I am convinced, does not proceed from any thing in the room in which I am, I cannot help aſcribing it to ſome cauſe without the room, unleſs I could believe that ſuch a thing as *ſound* could originate without any cauſe at all. Now men, animals, plants, and even metals and ſtones, are things that we can no more ſuppoſe to have exiſted without a cauſe, than a mere ſound.

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I am not ſolicitous about the term *ſpirit*, but I muſt have ſome name by which to diſtinguiſh that to which I aſcribe ſuch *powers* as cannot belong to any thing that I am able to ſee. A human body may be, and probably is, the ſeat of all the powers that are exerted by man; but there is in the conſtitution of man (of whatever materials he may conſiſt) marks of a deſign and intelligence infinitely ſuperior to any thing that is found in man. He, therefore, *muſt* have ſome ſuperior cauſe, and ſo muſt every thing elſe that, like man, is finite. Proceeding in this manner, we muſt come at laſt to a being whoſe intelligence is properly *infinite*, and then (beſides that we are under a *neceſſity* of reſting there) it ceaſes to be in the predicament of a man, or a plant, which muſt neceſſarily be dependent upon ſomething ſuperior to themſelves; though, for that very reaſon, it ceaſes to be the object of our conceptions.

It is not properly our ignorance of the energy and ſecret powers of nature, that is, of what is viſible in nature, that makes us

aſcribe them to ſomething that we call a ſpirit, but rather a perfect comprehenſion and knowledge, that ſuch beings as we ſee could not have exiſted without ſome ſuperior cauſe diſtinct from themſelves. This writer might juſt as well ſay, that it is becauſe I am ignorant of the ſecret energy of nature, that I enquire for the cauſe of a ſound that I hear, or of a watch that I meet with.

It is true that, becauſe men cannot account for the power of thinking in themſelves, they have had recourſe to an inviſible ſpirit, and likewiſe becauſe they cannot account for the order of the univerſe, they have recourſe to another, but greater, inviſible ſpirit. So far the two caſes reſemble each other; but, in fact, they are very different. I diſcover the fallacy of the popular opinion concerning the ſuppoſed inviſible ſpirit called the *ſoul*, or the ſeat of perception and thought in man, when I conſider that all the phenomena of perception and thought, depend upon the organization of the brain, and that therefore, whatever

thoſe

thoſe powers are, they *muſt*, according to the received rules of philoſophizing, be aſcribed to that organization. We are not to multiply cauſes without neceſſity. And when I reflect farther, I ſee that no difficulty is, in fact, removed by aſcribing the powers of perception and thought to an inviſible or immaterial ſpirit, becauſe there is no more perceivable connexion between what is *inviſible* than what is *viſible* and thoſe *powers*. It is true, that I have no diſtinct idea of *any* proper ſeat of thoſe mental powers, with what they can connect, or on what they may depend. But, for any thing that appears to the contrary, they may juſt as well connect with, and depend upon, the *brain*, as upon any inviſible ſubſtance within the brain.

But when I paſs from the immediate cauſe of thought in man to the cauſe of that cauſe, or the cauſe of this organization of the brain, I muſt neceſſarily look for it in ſomething that is at leaſt capable of underſtanding that organization; and this I know muſt be a Being of intelligence in-

finitely ſuperior to that of any *man*, and therefore, certainly very different from any thing human. For the ſame reaſon it is in vain that I look for this intelligence in the earth, the ſun, the moon, or the ſtars, or in all thoſe bodies combined.

There is, indeed, in the univerſe, that kind of *unity* which beſpeaks it to be *one work*, and, therefore, probably the work of one Being; but we by no means ſee that *continuity of ſubſtance*, which we find in the brain, ſo as to conclude from that analogy, that the parts of the viſible univerſe do themſelves conſtitute a thinking ſubſtance. What is viſible belonging to man *may*, for any thing we know to the contrary, be the ſeat of all his powers, and, therefore, according to the rules of philoſophizing, which teach us not to multiply cauſes or ſubſtances without neceſſity, *muſt be concluded* to be ſo. But what is viſible in the univerſe *cannot* be the ſeat of the intelligence that belongs to *it*, according to any analogy that we are acquainted with. Beſides, allowing, impoſſible as it muſt be, that ſo

disjointed

disjointed a ſyſtem as the material univerſe is, to have a *principle of thought* belonging to it, it has, however, ſo much the appearance of other works of deſign, that we muſt ſtill look out for *its* author, as much as for that of a man.

Concerning the origin of the human race, this writer ſays, p. 88, "The contemplator "of nature will ſee no contradiction in ſup- "poſing that the human race, ſuch as it is "at preſent, has either been produced in "time, or from all eternity.—But ſome re- "flections ſeem to give a greater probability "to the hypotheſis, that man is a produc- "tion in time, peculiar to the globe that "we inhabit; who conſequently, has no "higher origin than the globe itſelf, and "is a reſult from the particular laws that "govern it."

"To thoſe who, to cut the difficulty," p. 25, "pretend that the human race is de- "ſcended from a firſt man and firſt woman, "created by the divinity, we will ſay that "we have ſome idea of *nature*, but that we "have none of the *deity*, or of *creation*; and

"that

" that to make uſe of theſe terms, is to " ſay, in other words, that we are ignorant " of *the energy of nature*, and that we do " not know *how* it has produced the men " that we ſee."

It is, I acknowledge, equally reaſonable to ſuppoſe the race of men to have exiſted from eternity without any ſuperior cauſe, as to have begun to exiſt in time without one; but yet the latter ſuppoſition, which this writer thinks the more probable of the two, by removing the origin of man out of the obſcurity of eternity, appears more glaringly abſurd, being more directly oppoſite to every thing that we obſerve or experience. Had we ever ſeen any thing come into being in this manner, we might conclude that man *might* have done ſo; but having no experience of any ſuch thing, and, on the contrary, ſeeing every man, animal, and plant, to be deſcended from pre-exiſtent parents; we neceſſarily conclude that every individual of the ſpecies muſt have come into being in this manner, till we come to the firſt of the ſpecies; and this firſt we ſee no

difficulty in ſuppoſing to have been formed by a Being of ſufficient power and ſkill. In the ſame manner, we trace back a number of *echoes*, or reverberations of ſound, to ſome thing that, without being itſelf a ſound, has a power of exciting it. But the primary cauſe of *man* can no more be a man, than the primary cauſe of a *ſound* can be a ſound.

As this writer aſcribes every thing that exiſts to the energy of *nature*, he ſeems ſometimes to annex the ſame ideas to that word, that others do to the word *God*; ſo that, from ſome paſſages in his work, one would imagine that he was an atheiſt in name only, and not in reality.

"We cannot doubt," ſays he, vol. 2. p. 165, "of the power of Nature to pro-"duce all the animals that we ſee, by the "help of combinations of matter, which "are in continual action. Nature," vol. 2. p. 167, "is not a work. It has always "ſubſiſted of itſelf. It is in its boſom that "every thing is made. We cannot deny," ib. p. 170, "but that nature is very power-"ful, and very induſtrious. Nature," ib.

p. 173,

p. 173, "is not a blind cauſe. It does not "act at random. Nothing that it does "would appear *accidental* to him who "ſhould know its manner of acting; its re- "ſources, and ways. It is Nature," ib. p. 174, "that combines according to certain "and neceſſary laws, a head ſo organized as "to make a poem. It is Nature that gives a "brain proper to produce ſuch a work. "Nature," ib. p. 177, "does nothing but "what is neceſſary. It is not by acci- "dental combinations, and random throws, "that it produces the beings that we ſee. "Chance," ib. p. 178, "is nothing but a "word of imagination, like the word *God*, "to cover the ignorance we are under of "the acting cauſes in nature, whoſe ways "are often inexplicable."

If what this writer here calls *nature* be really capable of all that he aſcribes to it; if it be thus powerful and induſtrious, if it does nothing at random, and produces beings of ſuch intelligence as men, &c. it is indeed no bad ſubſtitute for a deity, but then it would be, in fact, only another

name

name for the ſame thing. It is the *powers*, not the *ſubſtance*, that we reverence; and a power like this, capable of producing men and animals, without pre-exiſtent parents, is a power not to be overlooked. I ſhould even think it capable of occaſioning as much ſuperſtitious dread as this writer imputes to the belief of a God. Alſo, if the powers of this nature favour virtue, as this writer ſtrongly contends, it might be even apprehended that, being capable of producing men at firſt, it might be capable of *re-producing* them after they had been dead and buried; ſo that an atheiſt who had been very wicked could not be quite ſure of eſcaping the puniſhment of his crimes even in the grave.

But, notwithſtanding all that this writer aſcribes to nature, and though it does not act at random, he imagines it has no intelligence or object; which I think is not a little paradoxical. "Nature," ſays he, vol. 2. p. 189, "has no intelligence or object. "It acts neceſſarily, becauſe it exiſts neceſ- "ſarily. It is we that have a neceſſary ob-

"ject, which is our own preſervation," p. 190. This writer, however, ſuppoſes man to act neceſſarily; ſo that merely acting *neceſſarily* is not incompatible with having an *object*. Conſequently, nature, though acting neceſſarily, *may*, according to his own mode of reaſoning, have an object; and that nature, or the author of nature, *has* had various objects, is juſt as evident as it is that man has objects. The power that formed an *eye* had as certainly ſomething in view, as he that conſtructed a *teleſcope*.

I am unable to purſue the inconſiſtencies of this celebrated writer any farther; and yet, taking the whole work together, it is the moſt plauſible and ſeducing of any thing that I have yet met with in ſupport of atheiſm; and the author is to be commended for writing in a frank and open manner, without the leaſt cover or reſerve, which is not the caſe with Mr. Hume.

I am,

Dear Sir, &c.

LETTER

LETTER XII.

An Examination of ſome fallacious Methods of demonſtrating the Being and Attributes of GOD.

DEAR SIR,

IT is, in ſome reſpects, to be regretted, that all the friends of religion do not agree in the principles on which they defend it; becauſe it gives their common adverſaries the advantage of various important conceſſions from ſome or other of them. This has, in fact, proceeded ſo far, that in the opinion of ſome theiſts, the principles of profeſſed atheiſts are not more dangerous than thoſe of their particular adverſaries, though equally declared theiſts with themſelves. Alſo, *human paſſions* interfering, the enemies of atheiſm are apt to diſpute with too much anger and rancour about their ſeveral modes of attack and defence,

and

and to repreſent thoſe who have the ſame ultimate object with themſelves, *as favourers of atheiſm*, though they may heſitate to call their principles directly *atheiſtical*.

But, on the other hand, this very circumſtance, though unfavourable in theſe reſpects, is not without ſome advantage; as different perſons may be impreſſed by different modes of reaſoning. And provided the great *moral purpoſe* be attained, which undoubtedly is an inward reverence for an inviſible Being, whom we conſider as the maker of us and of all things, who is our moral governor here, and will take cognizance of our conduct hereafter, the real friends of religion, and eſpecially thoſe of the moſt truly enlarged minds, will rejoice.

Nor do we need to be alarmed at any future diſcovery of the weakneſs of any principles of religion by thoſe who have built the moſt upon them. For if the ſuperſtructure itſelf be valued, a man will always look out for ſome better ſupports rather than let it fall altogether. There are few perſons of a ſpeculative

culative turn of mind but muſt have obſerved this in themſelves, with reſpect to various other valuable objects.

On how very different and oppoſite principles has the general doctrine of *morals* been founded, and how often have ſpeculative perſons changed their views of this ſeemingly momentous buſineſs; and yet it is not at all probable, that the *practice of morals* has ever ſuffered from this cauſe. On what different principles, alſo, have the civil and religious rights of men been founded, by perſons who have been equally ready to lay down their lives in defence of them, and who change their ſpeculative opinions without becoming advocates for ſlavery.

Why then ſhould any friend of religion be alarmed becauſe one perſon thinks that the being of God, and the great truths of natural religion, are to be proved in one way, and another perſon in a different way. If, as we muſt all acknowledge, it would be moſt injurious to call any perſon an atheiſt, merely becauſe he could not prove the being of a God at all, much more, certainly, muſt it

be injurious to call a perſon an atheiſt who does it ſatisfactorily to himſelf, though not ſo to us.

It is very rarely that thinking and ſpeculative perſons are convinced of any miſtake of conſequence, but let the confutation be ever ſo clear and undeniable, if the diſputant be a man of virtue, I ſhould not be apprehenſive that even principles the moſt indiſputably (yet, in fact, only *conſequentially*) atheiſtical, would ever make him an atheiſt.

What would become of the advocates of the doctrine of the *trinity*, if thoſe only ſhould be allowed to be trinitarians, who explained and defended it in the ſame manner. To ſay nothing of the general difference between ancient and modern times in that reſpect, few ſocieties, I apprehend, of that denomination of chriſtians at this day, would, on this principle, hold communion with each other.

In general, the truth of any particular propoſition may be ſo firmly aſſented to, and may be ſo intimately connected with numberleſs other tenets, that a man's *whole ſyſtem*

of

of opinions muſt give way before that one doctrine can be rooted out of his mind; and ſo total a revolution in the principles of men, who really think at all for themſelves, ſo ſeldom happens, that it is no reaſonable object of apprehenſion. It is happy for us that we are ſo conſtituted. Without this, we ſhould be in a ſtate of endleſs fluctuation; and it is almoſt better to have any principles, and any character, than no fixed principles, no proper character at all.

With reſpect to the ſubject of theſe Letters, I ſhall hope to derive this advantage from the diſcuſſion, that thoſe perſons who are atheiſtically inclined, and who have been confirmed in their diſbelief of the principles of religion by the injudicious manner in which ſome of its friends have defended it; may find their triumph premature; and that the ſyſtem of theiſm is not overturned, though they ſhould have ſucceeded in their refutation of ſome principles which have been *imagined* to be eſſential to it, and neceſſary ſupports of it.

With this calm, and I hope juſt view of the ſubject, I ſhall, in this Letter, endeavour to explain the fallacy of ſome of the ſpeculative principles on which real friends of religion have, at different times, endeavoured to ſupport the doctrines of a God and of a Providence. And, in doing this, I ſhall have no fear of increaſing, but, on the contrary, ſome hope of leſſening, the number of atheiſts.

1. I ſhall not detain you long with the opinion of thoſe who maintain that the belief of a God is an *inſtinctive principle*; becauſe I preſume it will, at this day, be generally acknowledged, that there is no evidence of *any* idea, or principle, being properly inſtinctive, or *innate*. We come into the world furniſhed with proper ſenſes to receive the various impreſſions to which we are expoſed; and the traces in the mind, left by thoſe impreſſions, appear to be the elements of all the ideas, and all the knowledge we ever acquire. Being then poſſeſſed of a natural capacity of acquiring to a certain degree every kind of valuable knowledge,

ledge, and the knowledge of God and of religion, as well as of other things, it is not agreeable to the analogy of nature to have the ſame things impreſſed upon us in another, and quite different manner.

Beſides, had the idea of God been originally impreſſed upon the minds of all men, the character would, no doubt, have been the ſame, and would not have been liable to ſo great variation, and perverſion, as we find it to have been. Nor could we imagine it could have been ſo nearly, if not intirely, effaced, as it appears to have been in ſome whole nations; if, indeed, it can be ſuppoſed poſſible, on that hypotheſis, for *any* perſon to have been an atheiſt.

This very unphiloſophical opinion, viz. that the belief of a God is an inſtinctive principle, not to be deduced by reaſoning from any appearances in nature, has, however, been aſſerted very lately, and every other mode of defending the primary truths of religion has been moſt arrogantly exploded, and ridiculed, by Dr. Beattie and Dr. Oſwald, on principles before advanced

by Dr. Reid; and yet of the good *intentions* of these writers, in this singular conduct, I never entertained a doubt, though such absurd principles, so haughtily advanced, and so weakly supported, in this enlightened age, deserve, in my opinion, every other censure. See my *Examination of these writers.*

2. Descartes thought that the very *idea* of a God was a sufficient proof of his existence. This opinion, if defensible at all, implies the former. For unless the idea of God be of such a nature as that it could not have been acquired by any impressions to which we are exposed, it must be impossible to say but that it may have been so formed. What is there in our idea of God but human perfections magnified; and what is our idea of *infinity* itself, but the mere negation of bounds?

3. There is another mode of reasoning concerning the being of God, which, I believe, originated with Dr. Clark, and is, I imagine, peculiar to this country, but it does not appear ever to have given general satisfaction; though some very eminent meta-

metaphyſicians are ſtill ſtrongly attached to it. To me, however, the fallacy of it ſeems very obvious.

According to this author, there muſt be a God, or an original deſigning cauſe of all things, becauſe it would be as much a contradiction to ſuppoſe the contrary, as to ſuppoſe that *two and two* are not equal to *four*. He alſo ſays, that the idea of God cannot be excluded from the mind, any more than the ideas of *ſpace* or *duration*, though we uſe every effort we can for that purpoſe.

Now a *contradiction* is ſaying and unſaying, affirming and denying a thing at the ſame time, or in the ſame ſentence; ſo that there is a manifeſt *contrariety*, or *incompatibility*, between thoſe ideas that are aſſerted to coincide; and this muſt appear without any reaſoning on the ſubject; juſt as if we ſhould ſay *white is black*, and yet retain the ideas uſually annexed to thoſe terms. We immediately perceive, without any reaſoning, that *black* cannot be *white*, or *white*, *black*. If we ſay that *two and two* are *five*, it is a contradiction, though in form one

ſtep ſhort of a *direct* one. To make it a direct contradiction, we ſhould firſt ſay that *two and two* are *four*, and then that *four* is *five*, which only is a direct, or proper contradiction.

Now where is the proper contradiction, direct or indirect, in ſaying *There is no God?* If we reduce it to a formal propoſition, it is, *The univerſe exiſts without a cauſe.* Now, falſe as the propoſition is, it is no more a contradiction (i. e. *in terms*, and there is no other proper contradiction) than to ſay that *God exiſts without a cauſe*, which is a truth. Becauſe neither is the idea annexed to the term *univerſe*, the direct reverſe of the idea annexed to the term *uncauſed*, nor does the idea annexed to the term *God* coincide with it.

As to the impoſſibility of excluding from our minds the idea of a deity, it is altogether an affair of *conſciouſneſs*; and with reſpect to myſelf, I have no ſcruple to ſay, that I find no difficulty at all in excluding the ideas of every thing in nature, except thoſe of *ſpace* and *duration*, and I cannot help being ſur-

prized

prized that the contrary ſhould ever have been aſſerted.

It is true that the belief of what actually exiſts compels us to the belief of a God, or an uncauſed Being, different from mere ſpace. But excluſive of the conſideration of *an exiſting univerſe*, from which I infer the belief of a God, as the neceſſary cauſe of it, there is nothing in the mere *idea* of a deity (as there evidently is in the idea of ſpace) that prevents a poſſibility of its being excluded from the mind. But it is proper that ſo reſpectable a writer as Dr. Clark ſhould be heard in his own words.

"The only true idea of a ſelf-exiſtent "or neceſſary exiſtent Being," *Demonſtration*, &c. p. 17, "is the idea of a Being, the "ſuppoſition of whoſe non-exiſting is an "expreſs contradiction.—The relation of "equality between *twice two* and *four* is an "abſolute neceſſity, only becauſe it is an "immediate contradiction in terms to ſup-"poſe them unequal. To uſe the word in "any other ſenſe," p. ib. "ſeems to be uſing "it without any ſignification at all,—If any

" one now aſk what ſort of idea, the idea of " that Being is, the ſuppoſition of whoſe " non-exiſting is thus an expreſs contra- " diction, I anſwer, it is the firſt and ſimpleſt " idea that we can poſſibly frame, or rather " which (unleſs we forbear thinking at all) " we cannot poſſibly extirpate, or remove " out of our minds, of a moſt ſimple Being, " abſolutely eternal, and infinite, original, " and independent."—Yet, as I have ſaid before, I cannot imagine any difficulty in excluding this idea. But he argues the ſame thing in a different manner.

" That he who ſuppoſes there may poſ- " ſibly be no eternal infinite Being in the " univerſe, ſuppoſes a contradiction, is evi- " dent from hence," p. 19, " that when he " has done his utmoſt in endeavouring to " imagine that no ſuch Being exiſts, he " cannot avoid imagining *an eternal and in-* " *finite nothing*; that is, he will imagine " eternity and immenſity removed out of " the univerſe, yet that, at the ſame time, " they ſtill continue there."

Here

Here I think is a manifeſt fallacy. If, by an *eternal and infinite nothing*, he meant that nothing will be eternal and infinite but *ſpace*, it is *falſe*, but ſurely no *contradiction*; and though an eternal and infinite deity be removed, an eternal and infinite ſpace will not. If there be no reference to the idea of ſpace (which indeed is not mentioned) the inconcluſiveneſs of the argument is too obvious to have eſcaped the obſervation of any perſon.

I acknowledge, with Dr. Clark, that a finite being cannot be ſelf-exiſtent; but I do not feel the force of his reaſoning on the ſubject, becauſe it is the ſame with the preceding. "To ſuppoſe a finite Being," p. 47, "to be ſelf-exiſtent, is to ſay, that it "is a contradiction for that Being not to "exiſt, the abſence of which may yet be "conceived without a contradiction, which "is the greateſt abſurdity in the world." Here he takes it for granted, that the idea of the ſelf-exiſtence of any Being implies its being a contradiction for that Being not to exiſt.

But

But though Dr. Clark advances thus far *a priori*, that is without any reference to an *exiſting univerſe*, in proof of the being of a God, he does not pretend to prove the divine *intelligence* in this manner, nor yet his *power*. "That the ſelf-exiſtent being," p. 55, "is an *underſtanding*, and really *active* being, cannot be demonſtrated ſtrictly "and properly *a priori*, becauſe we know "not wherein *intelligence* conſiſts, nor can "we ſee an immediate and neceſſary connexion of it with *ſelf-exiſtence*. The ſelf-exiſtent Being, the ſupreme cauſe of all "things," p. 80, "muſt of neceſſity have "infinite power, becauſe all things in the "univerſe were made by him, and all the "powers of all things are derived from "him, and entirely dependent upon him."

But, what is more extraordinary, this writer thinks he can prove the *moral attributes of God* from his intelligence only. This, however, conſidering that he does not pretend to prove intelligence itſelf *a priori*, is not, ſtrictly ſpeaking, an argument *a priori*.

That

That the ſupreme cauſe of all things muſt of neceſſity be a Being of infinite goodneſs, juſtice, and truth, and all moral perfections, he proves from this conſideration, that a being of infinite intelligence muſt perceive thoſe *neceſſary fitneſſes of things*, on which, according to him, morality depends; and, "having no want of any thing, "his will cannot be influenced," p. 125, "by any wrong affection, and, therefore, "he muſt of neceſſity do always what he "knows to be fitteſt to be done, i. e. he "muſt always act according to the ſtricteſt "rules of infinite goodneſs, juſtice, and "truth, and all other moral perfections."

As the idea concerning the *foundation of morals*, on which this argument proceeds, is another ſubject of diſcuſſion, I ſhall not enter into it here, except juſt obſerving, that I perceive no neceſſary connexion between *intelligence*, as ſuch, and any particular *intention*, or *object*, whatever; and, therefore, nothing can prove actual *benevolence*, in preference to *malevolence*, but the actual production of *happineſs*, in preference

ference to *misery*, or, at leaſt, a manifeſt tendency to it, in what is actually produced.

Dr. Clark's mode of reaſoning is not very different from that of Deſcartes, and others, who maintain that we can prove the exiſtence of a ſelf-exiſtent Being from the very *idea* we have of it. That the reader may ſee how he diſtinguiſhes in this caſe, I ſhall juſt recite what he ſays on the ſubject.

"I muſt have an idea of ſomething ac-
"tually exiſting without me," p. 22, "and
"I muſt ſee wherein conſiſts the abſolute
"impoſſibility of removing that idea, in
"conſequence of ſuppoſing the non-exiſt-
"ence of the thing, before I can be ſatiſ-
"fied, from that idea, that the thing ac-
"tually exiſts. The bare having an idea
"of the propoſition, *There is a ſelf-exiſtent*
"*Being*, proves, indeed, the thing not to be
"impoſſible (for of an impoſſible propoſi-
"tion there is properly no idea) but that it
"actually *is* cannot be proved from the
"idea, unleſs the certainty of the *actual*
"*exiſtence* of a neceſſarily exiſtent being
"follows

" follows from the *poſſibility* of the exiſt-
" ence of ſuch a being; which that it does,
" in this particular caſe, many learned men
" have indeed thought, and their ſubtle
" arguings on this head are not, perhaps,
" very eaſily to be diſapproved. But it is
" a much clearer and convincing way of
" arguing, to demonſtrate, that there does
" actually exiſt without us a Being whoſe
" exiſtence is neceſſary of itſelf, by ſhow-
" ing the manifeſt contradiction of the con-
" trary ſuppoſition, and, at the ſame time,
" the abſolute impoſſibility of deſtroying
" or removing ſome ideas, as of eternity and
" immenſity, which, therefore, muſt needs
" be the attributes of a neceſſary being ac-
" tually exiſting."—

Since, however, *mere ſpace*, as I have obſerved before, may eaſily be conceived to have exiſted *infinite* and *eternal*, without any thing to occupy it, it certainly cannot be neceſſary to ſuppoſe it the attribute of any other being. This is manifeſtly very unlike the caſe of *black*, *white*, *long*, *broad*, or other *mere properties*, which cannot be conceived

conceived without ſome *ſubject* to which they belong. The diſpute whether ſpace be a *ſubſtance*, or a *property*, is, in fact, merely, or little more than, verbal; becauſe we know nothing of any thing but its properties. But if *a capacity of ſubſiſting, in idea, by itſelf*, be a characteriſtic of *ſubſtance*, as oppoſed to *property*, ſpace, undoubtedly, ought to be denominated a ſubſtance, and not a mere property; though, when occupied by any other ſubſtance, it may aſſume the appearance of a property belonging to that ſubſtance. For, take away the ſubſtance, and the ſpace it occupied will not, in idea, go with it. Nay, in that ſenſe, it is more of the nature of ſubſtance than any thing elſe, becauſe it is impoſſible, even in idea, to ſuppoſe it not to be permanent.

If the whole of what Dr. Clark has advanced, on the proof of the being of a God, be attentively conſidered, it will not be very eaſy to ſay what his idea of God, as proved *a priori*, is. It is that of a Being ſelf-exiſtent, eternal, and co-extended with in-

finite

finite ſpace, but not ſpace It is the cauſe of all things, but without *power*, *intelligence*, or *moral attributes*; for theſe he makes to depend upon the perceived relation of things. Conſequently, they pre-ſuppoſe intelligence, which he acknowledges cannot be proved *a priori*.

In fact, therefore, he proves nothing *a priori* but *mere being*, without any proper *powers* whatever. But the terms, *being* or *ſubſtance*, give no ideas at all, when diveſted of powers or properties. So that, in reality, notwithſtanding his aſſertion of the contrary, it is nothing but *empty ſpace* that he is capable of proving *a priori*. And, with reſpect to this, I perfectly agree with him; becauſe, do what we will, we cannot ſo much as *ſuppoſe* infinite and eternal ſpace not to have exiſted.

Far, however, am I from ſaying that a deity, an *efficient deity*, with all his attributes, is not, properly ſpeaking, *neceſſarily exiſtent*; or that his exiſtence is not, in reality, as neceſſary as that of ſpace itſelf. But then we come to the knowledge of this

neceſſity, with reſpect to him, in a different manner. It is by beginning *a poſteriori*, finding that, in conſequence of the *actual exiſtence* of Beings that muſt have had a cauſe, there muſt have been ſome Being that could not have had a cauſe, though we are altogether at a loſs to conceive, *a priori*, *how*, or *why*, he ſhould exiſt without a cauſe, and can in idea eaſily imagine him not to have exiſted, which is not the caſe with reſpect to ſpace. Then, the neceſſary exiſtence of a ſupreme cauſe once ſuppoſed, there are various attributes, as thoſe of *eternity*, *immenſity*, and *unity*, that may either with certainty, or with the greateſt probability, be deduced from the conſideration of *neceſſary exiſtence*.

But though to us, and our conceptions, there be this difference between the idea of the exiſtence of ſpace, and of that of the deity, there may not be any in reality. Indeed, the deity could not have been *neceſſarily exiſtent*, if there had not been, in the nature of things, if we may uſe the phraſe (which, however, can only be improperly applied

applied in this caſe) as much reaſon for his exiſtence, as for that of ſpace. But neither the term *reaſon*, nor any thing equivalent to it, ought, in ſtrictneſs, to be uſed in this caſe, leſt it ſhould imply, contrary to the ſuppoſition, that there is ſome proper *cauſe* of the divine exiſtence, whereas he cannot have had any cauſe.

On this account, I diſlike the phraſeology of Dr. Clark, when he ſometimes ſpeaks of *neceſſity being the cauſe of the divine exiſtence*. Indeed the whole of our language is ſo appropriated to *finite* and *cauſed* beings, that it is hardly poſſible to uſe any part of it in ſpeaking with ſtrict propriety of a being *infinite* and *uncauſed*. We ſhould, therefore, forgive one another any overſights of this nature that we inadvertently fall into.

I am,

Dear Sir, &c.

LETTER XIII.

Of the Ideas of CAUSE *and* EFFECT, *and the Influence of Mr. Hume's Opinion on this Subject in the Argument for the Being of a* GOD.

DEAR SIR,

AS ſome perſons have imagined that the cauſe of atheiſm has derived conſiderable advantage from Mr. Hume's ideas concerning the nature of *cauſe and effect*, I ſhall, in this letter, endeavour to ſhew that the apprehenſion is without foundation.

Mr. Hume ſays, that all we can pretend to know concerning the connexion of cauſe and effect, is their conſtant *conjunction*; by the obſervance of which the mind is neceſſarily led from the one to the other. From this the friends of religion have ſuppoſed that, if this repreſentation be juſt, the connexion is merely *arbitrary*, and, therefore, that

that ſuch things as we have uſually called *effects* may take place without any thing that we have uſually obſerved to correſpond to them, as their *cauſes*. Conſequently, that, for any thing that we know to the contrary, the univerſe itſelf may have exiſted from eternity without any ſuperior cauſe.

To guard againſt this, ſome of the friends of religion deny that our idea of *power* or *cauſation* is derived from any thing that we properly obſerve. But, imperfect as Mr. Hume's ideas on the ſubject are (notwithſtanding his laborious and tireſome diſcuſſion of it, and its being evidently a favourite topic with him) I think I have ſufficiently ſhewn, in the third of the *Eſſays* prefixed to my Edition of *Hartley's Theory of the Mind*, that there is nothing in the idea of *power*, or *cauſation* (which is only the ſame idea differently modified) that is not derived from the impreſſions to which we have been ſubject, this being to be ranked in the claſs of *abſtract ideas*, where it does not appear that Mr. Hume ever thought

of looking for it. In the Eſſay I here refer to, p. 36, I have ſhewn that the idea of *power*, is far from being, what ſome take it to be, a ſimple idea, but that, on the contrary, it is one of the moſt complex ideas that we have, conſiſting of what is common to numberleſs impreſſions of very different kinds.

Beſides, if the idea of power be any thing that cannot be acquired by *experience*, it comes under the deſcription of other *innate principles*, or *ideas*, which have been ſo long, and, I think, ſo juſtly exploded, that I think myſelf at liberty to take it for granted that there is no ſuch thing.

But I ſhall proceed to obſerve that, in whatever manner we come by the idea of power or cauſation, it is an idea that all men have, and correſponds to ſomething *real* in the relation of the things that ſuggeſt it. It is true, that all we properly *ſee* of a *magnet*, and a *piece of iron*, is that, at certain diſtances they approach to one another, and of a *ſtone*, that, in certain circumſtances, it invariably tends towards the earth;

earth; and we cannot give any proper, or ſatisfactory *reaſon* why either of theſe effects ſhould take place in theſe circumſtances. Yet we have always found that, in a ſimilar conſtant conjunction of appearances, we have never failed to diſcover, whenever we have been able to make any diſcovery at all, that the event could not have been otherwiſe. And though, in theſe caſes, we have only diſcovered a *nearer*, and never *the ultimate* cauſe of any appearance, yet there is an invariable experience in favour of *ſome* real and ſufficient cauſe in all ſuch conjunctions.

In conſequence of this experience, it is indelibly impreſſed upon the minds of all men, that all events whatever, and all productions whatever, muſt have a neceſſary and adequate cauſe; ſo that "nothing can "begin to be without a cauſe foreign to "itſelf."

And let any perſon pretend what he will, he muſt himſelf (in conſequence of the impreſſions to which he, together with the reſt of mankind, has uniformly been

expoſed) have come under the influence of it, and of courſe have the ſame perſuaſion.

Though, therefore, by means of ſome ſecret bias, and ſophiſtical argumentation, a man may come to be perſuaded that the univerſe has had no ſuperior cauſe, he cannot deny but that all other things (which the theiſt muſt ſhow to be in the ſame predicament with the univerſe) muſt have had ſuch a cauſe; ſo that nothing is to be apprehended from his idea of *the nature of cauſation in general.* What ever that idea be (and, in fact, it will be the ſame with that of the reſt of mankind, let any perſon give whatever account of it he pleaſes) he will neceſſarily expect a ſuperior cauſe in thoſe circumſtances in which mankind in general will be ſatisfied that a cauſe is requiſite.

Different perſons *feel*, and are *perſuaded*, differently enough in ſome caſes; but where the influences to which their minds have been ſubject have neceſſarily been nearly the ſame, the impreſſions made on them cannot

cannot be materially different. In this caſe, I ſhould ſooner imagine that the ideas annexed to the words *hunger* and *thirſt* ſhould be different in different perſons, than the ideas annexed to the words *power* and *cauſation*, or that they ſhould have different effects in their ſerious arguments.

I am,

Dear Sir, &c.

LETTER XIV.

An Examination of Mr. Hume's Metaphyſical Writings.

DEAR SIR,

YOU are ſurprized, you tell me, that Mr. Hume, ſo great a maſter of reaſoning, ſo cool and diſpaſſionate a writer, and ſo ſubtle a metaphyſician, ſhould have written ſo looſely and unguardedly, as you

are

are now convinced he has done in this *posthumous work* of his; a work of which, it is evident, he made great account, by his taking such effectual measures for its publication after his death. But you cannot well suppose, having always entertained a different idea, that I can be sufficiently well-founded in the censure I have passed on his *metaphysical writings in general*, in my ninth Letter, and, therefore, you wish I would enter on the proof of what I have advanced, by a distinct exhibition of *all* that Mr. Hume has done in this way; that when all the observations he has advanced shall be seen without the imposition of his style and manner, its real merit, its solidity or futility, may plainly appear.

Now I am ready to give you the fullest satisfaction on this subject; and I should not have ventured to throw out that *general censure*, without being prepared to justify it in all the particulars, if you should call upon me to do it. Besides, I am not without hopes, that when you see on how narrow a foundation Mr. Hume's fame as a meta-

phyſician ſtands, his authority as a *reaſoner* will not weigh ſo much as it has hitherto done, with you and others who have only a general and indiſtinct notion of his being a *great philoſopher*, and an acute and guarded writer. This I ſhall do in as ſuccinct a manner as I can, in a regular analyſis of all his *Eſſays* that are in the leaſt to our preſent purpoſe.

In the firſt of his *Philoſophical Eſſays, on the different ſpecies of philoſophy*, which is only an introduction to the reſt, it appears that he had no idea of the connexion of the different faculties of the mind, and their dependence upon one principle, as that of *aſſociation*. For he ſays, p. 11, "The mind "is endued with ſeveral powers and facul- "ties; and theſe powers are totally diſtinct "from each other; but" p. 15, "We may "hope that philoſophy may carry its re- "ſearches farther, and diſcover at leaſt, in "ſome degree, the ſecret ſprings and prin- "ciples by which the human mind is actu- "ated in its operations." He ſays, how- ever, "it is probable that one operation and

"principle

"principle of the mind depends on another, "which again may be resolved into one "more general and universal." What that principle is, it is evident Mr. Hume had no idea.

In his second Essay, on *the origin of our ideas*, I find nothing that could have been *new*, but an ill-founded suspicion, "that "simple ideas are not, in every instance, de-"rived from corresponding impressions," merely because, having had ideas from actual impression of the extremes of any particular *colour*, we are able, without any farther assistance from actual impressions, to raise the idea of the intermediate shades of the same colour; not considering that this amounts to nothing more than a difference of *greater* or *less*, and, therefore, is not properly any new idea at all. It is no more than forming an idea of a middle sized hill, after having seen small hillocks, and large mountains.

Let a tender eye be strongly impressed with a luminous object, of white, or any other colour, and if the eye be immediately

shut,

ſhut, the impreſſion will, of itſelf, change into various other colours, as well as ſhades of the ſame colour; and there can be no doubt but that this would have been the caſe originally, though no ſuch colours had been known before. Now the ſubſtance of the brain being the ſame with that of the retina, and of the other nerves, it muſt be capable of ſuch changes of affection as theſe, from cauſes within itſelf; but ſtill the neceſſary conſequence of external impreſſions.

In the third Eſſay he reduces all the caſes of the connexion, or aſſociation, of ideas to three, viz. *reſemblance*, *contiguity* in place or time, and *cauſe and effect*, without attempting at a conjecture how ideas thus related to each other come to be aſſociated, or what circumſtances they have in common; though it was ſo eaſy to perceive that, in all of them, the immediate cauſe is nothing more or leſs than *joint impreſſion*; the univerſal and ſimple law of aſſociation being this, that two ſenſations, or ideas, preſent to the mind at the ſame time, will afterwards recal each other; which was well underſtood by Mr. Locke,

Locke, and all who had treated of aſſociation before Mr. Hume. Let us now ſee how eaſily this obſervation will explain Mr. Hume's three caſes.

Things connected in *time* and *place* are generally conſidered together, or ſo near to each other, that the remains of one of the ideas is not gone out of the mind before the other has entered it. This is the reaſon why we ſo readily repeat numbers in their progreſſive order, and are not ſo well able to do it in a retrogade order. We have been moſt accuſtomed to repeat them in that order.

Reſemblance is a *partial ſameneſs*, and when that part of any idea which is the very ſame with part of another is excited, it is evidently in conſequence of a former joint impreſſion that the remainder of the ſame idea is revived alſo.

Mr. Hume ſays, p. 44, that *contrariety* may perhaps be conſidered as a ſpecies of *reſemblance*, for a reaſon for which I muſt refer the reader to the Eſſay itſelf. But things oppoſed to one another are frequently

compared,

compared, and *conſidered together*. It is, therefore, from frequent joint impreſſion that their eaſy aſſociation is moſt naturally to be accounted for.

Things that are *cauſes and effects* to each other are alſo often contemplated together, and by habit we do not conſider our knowledge of any thing to be complete, without knowing the cauſe if it be an effect, or the effects if it be a cauſe. We think the idea to be as incomplete as that of the head of a man without his body, or of his body without his head. We feel them as different parts of the ſame thing.

Little, and imperfect, as what Mr. Hume has advanced on this ſubject manifeſtly is, he ſeems to have imagined that he had done ſomething very great, when he concludes the Eſſay with ſaying, "the full explication of "this principle, and all its conſequences, "would lead us into reaſonings too pro- "found and too copious for theſe Eſſays. "It is ſufficient at preſent to have eſta- "bliſhed this concluſion, that the three "connecting principles of all ideas are the "relations

"relations of reſemblance, contiguity, and "cauſation."

The fourth Eſſay, entitled *Sceptical Doubts*, relates to our inferring an effect from a cauſe, aſſerting, that it is by a proceſs that is not properly *reaſoning*, becauſe all that we obſerve is the two ſeparate ideas, and we are altogether ignorant of their connexion; and in his fifth Eſſay, entitled, quaintly enough, *the Sceptical Solution of thoſe Doubts*, he ſays, that we make the inference by the principle of *habit*, or cuſtom; which comes to this, that the two ideas have always been aſſociated together, ſo that, as he expreſſes it, the mind is naturally led from one of them to the other, or, as he ſhould have ſaid more properly, one of them will neceſſarily introduce the other.

Leaving the queſtion in this ſtate, he may, with ſuperficial readers, have weakened the foundation of our reaſoning from effects to cauſes, as if it was properly no *reaſoning* at all (which is language that he frequently uſes) but only an arbitrary, and perhaps ill-founded, aſſociation of ideas. Whereas he would

would only have done juſtice to his ſubject, to have added, that, having found, in all ſuch *conſtant* conjunctions of ideas, with reſpect to which we have been able to make any diſcovery at all, that the conjunction was really *neceſſary*, we conclude that the conjunction, if conſtant, is equally neceſſary, even when we are not able diſtinctly to perceive it. We, therefore, *preſume* it, and ſecurely act upon it. Indeed, without having made any diſcovery at all, we could not but be ſenſible, that if two events always follow one another, there muſt be ſome ſufficient reaſon for it.

As almoſt every pretenſion to *diſcovery*, or *novelty*, is contained in this obſervation of Mr. Hume's, I ſhall conſider it a little more ſtrictly. When we ſay that two events, or appearances, are *neceſſarily connected*, all that we can mean is, that ſome more general law of nature muſt be violated before thoſe events can be ſeparated. For example, I find that the ſounding of one muſical ſtring will make another ſtring that is uniſon, &c. with it, to ſound alſo; and finding this

obſervation invariable, I call the ſounding of the firſt ſtring the *cauſe*, and that of the ſecond the *effect*, and have no apprehenſion of being diſappointed in my expectation of the conſequence. But I do not ſee what ſhould make this conjunction neceſſary, till I diſcover that ſound conſiſts of a vibratory motion of the air, and that the air being put into this vibratory motion by the firſt ſtring, communicates the ſame to the ſecond by its pulſes, in the ſame manner as the firſt ſtring itſelf was made to vibrate.

In like manner, it was always known (and mankind have always acted on the perſuaſion) that reſpiration is neceſſary to animal life, and that air frequently breathed, &c. is fatal to it, though it is only of late that we have diſcovered the connexion of thoſe effects with the cauſe. In due time we may diſcover the cauſe of this cauſe, &c.

The idea annexed to the term *cauſe*, or *neceſſary agency*, is not a ſimple idea, or what could originally have been formed in the mind by the perception of any two other

ideas,

ideas, as Mr. Hume ſeems to have expected (and which notion alone could ſuggeſt any difficulty in the caſe) but it repreſents the impreſſion left in the mind by obſerving what is common to numberleſs caſes in which there is a conſtant conjunction of appearances or events, in ſome of which we are able to ſee the proximate cauſe of the conjunction, but with reſpect to the reſt we only *preſume* it, from the ſimilarity of the caſes. Notwithſtanding, therefore, a definite idea, correſponding to the words *cauſe* or *power*, does not occur to the mind on the original compariſon of any two particular ideas, the inference from effects to cauſes, whether Mr. Hume will call it *reaſoning* or not, is, in many caſes, as ſafe as any reaſoning whatever, ſo that no ſceptic can derive the leaſt advantage from this conſideration.

The latter part of this Eſſay (which I dare ſay Mr. Hume conſidered as the firſt in importance in the whole work) contains a very imperfect and manifeſtly falſe account of the difference between *belief* and *imagi-*

nation. "Belief," he ſays, p. 82, "is no-"thing but a more vivid, lively, forceable, "firm, ſteady conception of an object, than "what the imagination alone is ever able "to attain." And to account for this *manner* of conception, he ſays, that whenever we are led from one idea to another, by the connexion of *reſemblance*, or *contiguity*, and therefore, probably, by that of *cauſation* too, we at the ſame time get a *ſtronger* conception of it than we ſhould otherwiſe attain. Unable to account for this, he aſcribes the fact to an *inſtinct of nature*. But he might juſt as well have done what Drs. Reid, Beattie, and Oſwald, did afterwards, viz. aſcribe the ſentiment of *belief itſelf*, as well as that which is the *cauſe of belief*, to an arbitrary inſtinct of nature.

In reality, nothing can be more evidently falſe than what he here ſuppoſes. For how often does it happen that we are more affected by a repreſentation of fictitious diſtreſs, in a novel, or on the theatre, than by inſtances of real diſtreſs in common life. It is true that, *ceteris paribus*, *reality* makes a

ſtronger

ſtronger impreſſion than *fiction*; and, therefore, when an impreſſion is, by artificial means, made ſtronger than uſual, it ſometimes impoſes upon us for truth. But the idea annexed to the word *truth* is of a very complex nature, and is the impreſſion that is left in the mind by thouſands of caſes in which *real exiſtence* has been diſcriminated from that which has none.

A child hears a tale of diſtreſs, and having always had the truth told him, he, of courſe, believes it, and according to his previouſly acquired ſenſibility, is affected with it; but he inquires farther, and finds that he has been impoſed upon. Either no ſuch perſon exiſted, or ſuch and ſuch things did not happen to him. He alſo reads tales of diſtreſs, &c. in books, but finds, by comparing them with other books, and other accounts, they had no exiſtence. From much obſervation of this kind, a complex idea, formed by a number of circumſtances, is left in the mind, and to this he gives the name of *truth*, an idea which he learns to reſpect more and more every day, and which

he acquires a habit of affixing, with all its *ſecondary ideas* of reſpect, with juſtneſs and effect, as he advances in life; ſo that, independently of the *ſtrength of our feelings*, or imagination, we act very differently, according as we ſee reaſon to annex this idea of *truth* to a ſtory, or not.

Mr. Hume ſays, p. 90, "When a ſword is "levelled at my breaſt, does not the idea of "wounds and pains ſtrike me more ſtrongly "than when a glaſs of wine is preſented to "me, even though, by accident, this idea "ſhould occur after the appearance of the "latter object." But let an executioner, whom he believes to have a commiſſion to run a ſword through his body, be at the diſtance of a hundred miles from him, and though there be neither a ſword, nor the figure of a ſword near him, he would, I doubt not, by only *thinking* of a ſword, in thoſe circumſtances, feel very differently, and more ſtrongly, than if he ſhould take a real ſword in his own hand, and hold the point of it to his naked breaſt, when he had no apprehenſion of any deſign to hurt himſelf

himself with it. But how does this tally with Mr. Hume's account of the difference between belief and fiction?

It is evident that Mr. Hume had no idea of the extent of the power of association in the human mind, by means of which a single idea may consist of thousands of parts, being a miniature of numberless *trains of ideas*, and of whole successive *states of mind*, and yet be perfectly distinct from other ideas, consisting of as many parts, every such complex idea retaining its separate character and powers. The very *names* of persons famous in history excite in our minds an epitome of all that we know concerning them, the particulars of which we may have forgotten. How complex also are the ideas belonging to words expressive of *national customs*, *ranks*, and *orders of men*, which, however, when pronounced ever so slightly, excite ideas perfectly distinct from each other, as much as those denoting the most simple ideas.

Now the ideas of *cause*, *effect*, *reason*, *instinct*, *probability*, *contingency*, *truth*, *falsehood*,

hood, &c. &c. &c. are of this nature, requiring definitions of some extent; and the ideas they in fact excite are miniatures of much more than enters into the shortest possible description of them; for they were not attained in that manner; and yet all the parts perfectly coalesce, and form distinct and permanent ideas. I have endeavoured to give some account of this business in the third of the *Essays prefixed to my edition of Hartley's theory of the mind*.

Mr. Hume, in his sixth Essay, p. 94, says that "the sentiment of belief is begotten "in the mind by an inexplicable contri-"vance of nature. Let any one try," he says, p. 97, "to account for this operation "of the mind upon any received system of "philosophy, and he will be sensible of the "difficulty." On the system of Hartley there is no difficulty in it at all.

In the seventh Essay, *on Power*, he only more particularly insists upon it, that we know of no connexion between the idea of any cause and that of any effect, though we suppose there *is* some connexion. Of this

I have

I have given, I preſume, a ſufficient account already.

In his eighth Eſſay, on *Liberty and Neceſſity*, he very clearly illuſtrates ſome of the arguments in favour of Neceſſity; but not having any comprehenſion of the *great ſyſtem*, of which that doctrine is a part, he, without the leaſt reaſon, and without the leaſt concern, abandons it to the moſt ſhocking immoral conſequences. Whereas, in reality, nothing is more favourable to the moſt ſublime ſentiments of virtue, in all its branches, as I have ſhewn at large in my *Illuſtrations of that doctrine*.

His ninth Eſſay, *on the Reaſon of Animals*, contains very little indeed. He only aſſerts, p. 169, that "it is cuſtom alone that engages animals, from every object that "ſtrikes their ſenſes, to infer its uſual attendant, and carries their imaginations "from the appearance of one to conceive "the other, in that ſtrong and lively manner which we denominate belief." This, unable to give any better account of, he calls

calls *inſtinct*, and ſays, that man avoids fire by inſtinct alſo. Whereas, if by inſtinct be meant any thing different from the aſſociation of ideas (which certainly were not born with us) nothing is more contrary to fact. A child knows nothing of a dread of fire, but acquires it in conſequence of the ſenſation of pain from it. He can even hardly be prevented from putting his finger into the flame of a candle. How Mr. Hume could reconcile this well-known fact with a proper *inſtinctive dread of fire*, is not eaſy to ſay.

The tenth Eſſay, on *Miracles*, is intended to ſupport a principle, according to which the relation of no appearance whatever, not evidently ſimilar to former appearances, can be credible; a principle which we ſee refuted every day in experimental philoſophy, and which nothing could have given the leaſt countenance to, or have intitled to any conſideration, but its affecting the credit of the miracles recorded in the Scriptures. On this account it has been

been refuted by many perſons, and I have conſidered it in my *Inſtitutes of Natural and Revealed Religion.*

The eleventh Eſſay, *on a particular Providence and a future State,* I have examined in my tenth Letter.

In his twelfth Eſſay, Mr. Hume maintains that "becauſe all we know of any object is "the idea of it in our minds, we can never "prove," p. 241, "that thoſe ideas, or per-"ceptions, may not ariſe from the energy of "the mind itſelf, or from the ſuggeſtion of "ſome inviſible or unknown ſpirit, or ſome "other cauſe ſtill more unknown to us," and that the ſuppoſition of a connexion between thoſe perceptions of the mind and external objects is without any foundation in reaſoning; not conſidering that we have juſt the ſame reaſon for believing the exiſtence of external objects, that we have for the truth of the Copernican ſyſtem. They are *the eaſieſt hypotheſes for acknowledged facts,* as I have ſhewn at large in the *Introduction to my Examination of the writings of Drs. Reid, Beattie,* and *Oſwald.*

His

His obſervation, p. 243, that *all ſenſible qualities*, and, therefore, that *extenſion* itſelf, is in the mind, and not without us, is trifling. He might as well have ſaid, that becauſe *ſound* is a thing formed within a muſical inſtrument, and not without it, there is nothing without it that produces the ſound.

To his objection to the infinite diviſibility of matter, p. 246, to ſome angles being infinitely leſs than others, and thoſe again diviſible *ad infinitum*, which he allows to be *demonſtrable*, and yet ſays, is *big with contradiction and abſurdity*, at the ſame time that he acknowledges that "nothing can be more "ſceptical, or more full of doubt and heſita-"tion, than this ſcepticiſm itſelf," I ſurely need ſay nothing. This does not amount to ſo much as a *ſceptical ſolution of a ſceptical doubt*. It may rather be called *the ſceptical propoſal of a ſceptical doubt*.

In the concluſion of this laſt Eſſay, we find the outline of all the ſcepticiſm of his poſthumous work, with the ſame paltry *cover*, viz. that "all reaſoning from the rela-"tion of cauſe and effect is founded on a

"certain inſtinct of our nature, and may be "fallacious and deceitful," p. 251, that "we can never ſatisfy ourſelves concerning "any determination we may form with re-"gard to the origin of worlds, and the ſitua-"tion of nature from and to eternity;" p. 255, that "divinity or theology," p. 209, "as it proves the exiſtence of a deity, &c. "has a foundation in reaſoning, ſo far as it "is ſupported by experience" (which ſupport in a former Eſſay he abſolutely denies it to have) "but that its beſt and moſt "ſolid foundation is *faith* and divine reve-"lation."

In the firſt of theſe Eſſays, Mr. Hume had ſaid, "We have, in theſe Eſſays, attempted "to throw ſome light upon ſubjects, from "which uncertainty has hitherto deterred "the wiſe, and obſcurity the ignorant." How very ſmall is the light that he has thrown, and mixed with how much darkneſs, I need not repeat. "Happy," ſays he, p. 18, "if we can unite the different ſpecies of "philoſophy, by reconciling profound in-"quiry with clearneſs, and truth with no-"velty;

"velty; and ſtill more happy, if reaſoning "in this eaſy manner, we can undermine "the foundation of an abſtruſe philoſophy, "which ſeems to have ſerved hitherto only "as a ſhelter to ſuperſtition, and a cover to "abſurdity and error."

Now I neither ſee the *profundity*, nor the *clearneſs* of his reaſoning, except in things with reſpect to which he is far from being *original*, notwithſtanding his advantage of a command of language, and a great power of perſpicuity, where his argument would admit of it. As to the *abſtruſe philoſophy* which he meant to undermine, it could be nothing but the doctrine of *certainty*, and a ſteady perſuaſion concerning *truth*, and eſpecially the truths of natural and revealed religion; and what kind of a mind muſt that man have had, to whom *this* could give any ſatisfaction!

All men by no means judge of the value of publications by the ſame rules with Mr. Hume, or perhaps his own Eſſays would be in more danger than he himſelf imagined. "When we run over libraries, perſuaded of "thoſe

"thoſe principles," ſays he, p. 259, "what "havock muſt we make? If we take in "hand any volume of Divinity, or School "Metaphyſics, for inſtance, let us aſk, Does "it contain any abſtract reaſonings concern- "ing quantity or number? No. Does it "contain any experimental reaſonings con- "cerning matter of fact, or exiſtence? No. "Commit it then to the flames: For it can "contain nothing then but ſophiſtry and il- "luſion." It is happy for us all, that we are not judges for one another in theſe caſes, but that a wiſe providence over-rules all things. The *ſcriptures* were certainly not meant to come under either of Mr. Hume's characters of *books to be ſaved from the flames.*

In the preceding obſervations, I think I have deſcanted upon every thing of Mr. Hume's, in which it can be pretended, or in which he himſelf would have pretended, that he had made any advances in the knowledge of the human mind. I need not now ſay how inconſiderable thoſe advances were. All that he has obſerved relates to the power of aſſociation, and his ideas on that ſubject

were

were much confined, going very little, if indeed, on the whole, any thing at all, beyond thoſe of Mr. Locke, and others who had preceded him.

Mr. Hume had not even a glimpſe of what was at the ſame time executing by Dr. Hartley, who, in an immenſe work, of wonderful comprehenſion and accuracy, has demonſtrated, that this ſingle principle of *aſſociation* is the great law of the human mind, and that all thoſe which Mr Hume, as well as others, had conſidered as *independent faculties*, are merely different *caſes*, or *modifications* of it; that *memory*, *imagination*, *judgment*, the *will*, and the *paſſions*, have the ſame, and no other origin; ſo that by means of this one property, and the circumſtances in which we are placed, we all of us come to be every thing that we are.

In his *Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*, Mr. Hume very well illuſtrates what I fancy he himſelf would not pretend to be *new*, though, I believe, it had not been ſufficiently attended to by Metaphyſicians, viz. that "utility is the foundation of virtue;"

and

and this being the moſt conſiderable and the moſt elaborate work of Mr. Hume's, I have referred to it as a ſpecimen of analytical reaſoning, in my *Lectures on Criticiſm*. But in this work Mr. Hume refers the pleaſing *feelings*, annexed to the perception of virtue, to *an inſtinct of nature*, confeſſedly unable to trace them any farther. "It is "needleſs," he ſays, p. 85, "to puſh our "reſearches ſo far as to aſk why we have "humanity, or a fellow-feeling with others. "It is ſufficient that this is experienced to "be a principle in human nature. We muſt "ſtop ſomewhere in our examination of "cauſes, and there are in every ſcience ſome "general principles beyond which we can-"not hope to find any principle more gene-"ral." Dr. Hartley, however, not reſting where Mr. Hume did, has, with wonderful ſagacity, diſcovered the origin of benevolence, of the moral ſenſe, and of every other principle before thought to be *inſtinctive*, ſhewing how they are derived from aſſociation, affecting us in our infant ſtate, and as

we advance in life; and he has ſhewn the diverſity that we find in human affections to ariſe from a diverſity of influences, operating on us in the ſame general manner.

In this work, Mr. Hume claſſes *humility* among the *vices*, with no other view, that I can perceive, but to ſhew his contempt for the chriſtian ſyſtem, in which it makes a principal figure, as a virtue. And he has wholly overlooked all the virtues of the *devotional kind*, when, in fact, they may be ſhewn, by arguments independent of the peculiar doctrines of revelation, to be, in their own nature, the moſt truly *valuable*, as well as the moſt *ſublime* of all others, and to form what may be called the *key-ſtone* of every truly great and heroic character. Without the virtues of this claſs (though Dr. Smith conſiders Mr. Hume as "approaching as "nearly to the idea of a perfectly wiſe and "virtuous man as perhaps the nature of "human frailty will permit") his character muſt have been as imperfect as his views

(looking

(looking to nothing beyond the grave) were narrow.

I have thus given you my reaſons, as briefly as I well could, for placing Mr. Hume ſo low as I do in the claſs of *metaphyſical writers*, or *moral philoſophers*. As to *Natural Philoſophy*, or *Mathematics*, I never heard that he had any pretenſions to merit; and of that which conſtitutes an *hiſtorian*, you will not, I imagine, think that much remains to him, beſides that of a *pleaſing compiler*, after reading Dr. Towers's judicious Remarks on his *Hiſtory of England*. His *Miſcellaneous* and *Political* Eſſays always pleaſed me, but they by no means entitle him to the *firſt rank* among writers of either claſs. As to his *ſtyle*, notwithſtanding its excellence in ſome reſpects, I have ſhewn in my *Engliſh Grammar* (and, as I have been informed, to Mr. Hume's own ſatisfaction) that he has departed farther from the true idiom of the Engliſh language, than perhaps any other writer of note in the preſent age.

Submitting all my obſervations to your own judgment, and ſincerely wiſhing the

happieſt iſſue to your laudable purſuit of truth, I remain,

Dear Sir,

Your very humble Servant,

J. PRIESTLEY.

CALNE, *March*, 1780.

ADDITIONAL LETTERS

TO A

PHILOSOPHICAL UNBELIEVER.

IN ANSWER TO

MR. WILLIAM HAMMON.

PREFACE.

IT is certainly to be wiſhed that every man was at full liberty, not only to publiſh his real opinions on any ſubject whatever, but alſo to urge them with the greateſt force, and to recommend them by the ſtrongeſt arguments that he can produce in ſupport of them. No *lover of truth* will wiſh to ſtand on any other ground. For my own part, I rejoice that a *profeſſed*

atheiſt has thought proper to ſtand forth in defence of his principles, though it is not with all the conſiſtent boldneſs that may be expected from one who believes in a God, a providence, and a future ſtate. I myſelf have no opinions that I wiſh to ſhelter behind any *authority* whatever; and ſhould rejoice to ſee the time (and that time, I doubt not, as the world improves in wiſdom, will come) when the civil powers will relieve themſelves from the attention they have hitherto given to all matters of ſpeculation, and religion amongſt the reſt; an attention which has proved ſo embarraſſing to the governors, and ſo diſtreſſing to the governed; and when no more countenance will be given to any particular mode of *religion*, than is given to particular modes of *medicine*, or of *philoſophy*.

Individuals are much better ſituated for providing for themſelves, in this reſpect, than any *repreſentatives* can do for them; and the religion that men would voluntarily adopt for themſelves would make them the beſt

beſt ſubjects to any government, and eſpecially to one that ſhould allow them all, without diſtinction, this perfect and equal liberty. This would be an attachment much ſtronger, and more valuable, than any that can be ſecured by *hire*, as is that of the members of an eſtabliſhed church. However, till *nations* get wiſdom, *individuals* muſt bear with their folly, and endeavour to inſtruct them; and this is moſt effectually done, by the explicit avowal, and the fearleſs defence, of whatever we apprehend to be true, and to be conducive to the good of ſociety and of mankind.

That our readers may form a juſt idea of the ſubject of the preſent controverſy, it may be proper to inform them, that Mr. Hammon, though a declared atheiſt, is far from aſſerting, with the Epicureans of old, and the generality of atheiſts before him, that there are no marks of *deſign* in the viſible univerſe. Beſides what I have quoted from him in the courſe of theſe Letters, he conſiders it as undeniably true (p. 4.) that "atoms cannot be arranged in

"a manner expreſſive of the moſt exquiſite "deſign, without competent intelligence "having exiſted ſomewhere."

He ſays farther (*Prefatory Addreſs*, p. 28) The "*vis naturæ*, the perpetual induſtry, "intelligence, and proviſion of nature, muſt "be apparent to all who ſee, feel, or think. "I mean to diſtinguiſh this active, intelli- "gent, and deſigning principle, inherent "as much in matter, as the properties of "gravity, or any elaſtic, attractive, or re- "pulſive power, from any extraneous fo- "reign force and deſign, in an inviſible "agent, ſupreme, though hidden lord, and "maſter over all effects and appearances "that preſent themſelves to us in the courſe "of nature. The laſt ſuppoſition makes "the univerſe, and all other organized "matter, a machine, made or contrived by "the arbitrary will of another being, which "other being is called *God*; and my theory "makes a God of this univerſe, or admits "no other God, or deſigning principle, "than matter itſelf, and its various orga- "nizations."

Such

Such is the fair ſtate of this controverſy. It is my buſineſs, therefore, to ſhew, in the firſt place, that the viſible univerſe is not, and cannot be, that *uncauſed being*, which Mr. Hammon ſuppoſes; and ſecondly, that the ſeat of that intelligence, which is acknowledged to be in the univerſe, cannot be in the viſible univerſe itſelf, but muſt reſide in, and belong to, ſome being diſtinct from it. One of theſe hypotheſes muſt be true; for a third cannot be imagined.

Theſe, then, are the principal ſubjects of the following Letters. But I have alſo taken ſome notice of what Mr. Hammon has obſerved with reſpect to the moral attributes of the deity, the moral influence of religion, and other ſubjects of a miſcellaneous nature.

Mr. Hammon is alſo ſo far from reprobating, as other atheiſts have done, the idea of a *future life*, that he not only conſiders it as deſirable, but even as not impoſſible, or incredible. For he places it among the things *inadmiſſible* and *inconcluſive* (p. 10) that

that "an atheiſt believes himſelf to be at "his death for ever excluded from return-"ing life."

Atheiſm, ſo qualified, certainly loſes much of the horror with which it has hitherto been regarded, and affords room to hope that it will ſoon give place to the ſyſtem which gives us the fulleſt and moſt ſatiſfactory aſſurance of that *future life*, to which Mr. Hammon looks with *deſire*, and, ſeemingly, not without ſome degree of *hope*. This certainly ought to be a motive with the world to give him a patient hearing; they have ſo much reaſon to expect a favourable iſſue to the debate. What occaſion can there be for *terror*, or *violence* of any kind, when there is ſo little reaſon to diſtruſt the natural power of *truth*. If I fail, let abler champions be called in; but let atheiſm triumph, rather than religion, by the help of force.

To conclude this preface with enforcing the ſentiments with which it began: let thoſe weak chriſtians, who are for calling in the aid of the magiſtrate to ſuppreſs

hereſy

hereſy, learn to reſpect their religion more, and not act the part of the *moles* (in the excellent compariſon made uſe of by a worthy baronet, in the late debate on the Diſſenters bill) who thought that the mountain, at the foot of which they were at work, was in danger of falling, and conſulted how to provide ſome better foundation for it. Let them be aſſured, that its own natural baſis, is abundantly ſufficient for its ſupport.

If this compariſon does not ſtrike them, let them conſider the inſtructive fable of *the horſe and the ſtag*. What the horſe loſt by calling in the aid of the man, is but a faint emblem of what chriſtianity has loſt, by calling in the aid of the magiſtrate.—They have both of them, by this means, got *maſters*, who, on all occaſions, make uſe of them for their own purpoſes, without any regard to them.

This I now urge in favour of my adverſary; but it is language that I may have learned from ſtanding in the ſame predicament myſelf. For, as I have obſerved in the courſe of theſe Letters, if the laws of

this

this country were ſtrictly executed, we ſhould both be involved in the ſame fate. And, perhaps, while my antagoniſt and myſelf, like *the mouſe and the frog*, are aſſaulting each other with our weapons of pointed ſtraw, the great *eagle* of *civil power* may ſeize upon us both, and cruſh us, without diſtinction, and without mercy.

I make no apology for making no difference between the author of the *Prefatory Addreſs*, and the body of the work to which I am replying, as Mr. Hammon, the writer of the former, approves of, and adopts the latter; and to have diſtinguiſhed them from one another would have been rather embarraſſing. All the Letters are addreſſed to Mr. Hammon.

ADDITIONAL

ADDITIONAL LETTERS

TO A

PHILOSOPHICAL UNBELIEVER.

LETTER I.

Of Mr. HAMMON'S *Profeſſions and Conduct, &c.*

SIR,

WHEN I wrote my *Letters to a philoſophical Unbeliever*, I certainly wiſhed that ſome perſon of that character would calmly and ſeriouſly diſcuſs the arguments which I there advanced, for the belief of a God and a benevolent providence, and give me an opportunity of perceiving what it was that really determined his mind to a concluſion ſo different from my own; though I did not, as you ſeem to have imagined,

imagined, undertake to anſwer all the objections that might be made to what I had advanced on the ſubject. There is, however, ſomething ſo peculiar in your Anſwer, that I have thought proper to take notice of it, and on that account to add a few more *Letters* to thoſe that I publiſhed before.

There is a great appearance of *ingenuouſneſs*, and alſo of *courage*, in your conduct, which does you honour; and in this country, and in theſe times, I am confident it will not bring you into any inconvenience. You ſay (*Advertiſement*, p. 8) that you will be looked on as "a miracle of hardineſs, "for daring to put your name to what you "have publiſhed." And whereas, ſome have doubted, whether there ever was ſuch a perſon as a proper atheiſt, you ſay (*Prefatory Addreſs*, p. 17.) "To put that out "of all manner of doubt, I do declare "that, upon my honour, I am one. Be it, "therefore, for the future remembered, "that in London, in the kingdom of Eng-"land, in the year of our Lord one thou-

"ſand ſeven hundred and eighty-one, a "man hath publicly declared himſelf an "Atheiſt." You even profeſs your readineſs (ib. p. 21.) to ſuffer martyrdom in this cauſe, and to glory in it.

You muſt allow me, however, to obſerve, that I have not found in your conduct that perfect ingenuouſneſs and courage to which you pretend. You charge me with ſending no anſwer to the *Letter* which you have publiſhed in your *poſtſcript*, or "none that "ever came to your hand." But whether this was *my* fault or *yours*, let our readers judge from the following facts. That letter I received (only dated September 23d, and not October the 23d, 1781) on the 25th of September; and on the 27th of the ſame month, I ſent the following anſwer; addreſſed, according to your own ſubſcription, to Mr. *William Hammon, jun. Liverpool.* The poſt-mark alſo of your letter, was LIVERPOOL.

SIR,

SIR,

I SHALL be very happy to do every thing in my power to make you perfectly eaſy, with reſpect to the part you wiſh to take. But this can only be by giving you my real opinion, that you have nothing at all to fear, eſpecially if you write with decency, as a ſerious enquirer after truth. I am myſelf as obnoxious to the laws of this country as you can be; and at this day a *heretic* is, I ſhould think, in more danger than an *unbeliever*.

If, contrary to my expectations, any proſecution ſhould be undertaken againſt you, I can promiſe the moſt earneſt interpoſition of myſelf and my friends in your favour; but farther than this, I do not think it right to engage myſelf.

I do not recollect that I have any where undertaken to anſwer all my opponents: but this is of no conſequence. If what you write be deemed worthy of an anſwer, you need

need not fear having one, and from an abler hand than mine.

Sincerely wiſhing you may proceed in your purpoſe, and meet with no obſtruction in it, I am, SIR,

Your very humble ſervant,

BIRMINGHAM, 27th September, 1781. J. PRIESTLEY.

Four days after this I received the following.

REV. SIR,

I WROTE you a letter on a philoſophical ſubject this day ſe'nnight, ſince which I have had no anſwer. I only want now to know whether that letter reached you, and whether you intend to ſend me any anſwer, or not. I am, REV. SIR,

Your moſt obedient and humble ſervant,

WILLIAM HAMMON, JUN.

LIVERPOOL, September 30, 1781.

The poſt-mark of this letter was alſo LIVERPOOL.

I cannot ſay that the *tone* of this letter was pleaſing to me; nor indeed is it of a piece with the *civility* of the former letter; beſides that, the complaint contained in it muſt, upon the ſlighteſt reflection, have appeared unreaſonable. For I received your letter on the 25th, and omitting only one ſingle day, anſwered it on the 27th; and though it was poſſible that you might have received an anſwer before the 30th, it was barely ſo; and allowing for common accidents, ſuch as my being out of the way, or very particularly engaged at the time of its arrival at my houſe (which is not in Birmingham, but only near it) it was not to be expected.

No perſon, however, of your name could be found in Liverpool, though ſeveral perſons, ſome of them my particular friends, and at my requeſt, made diligent enquiry concerning you. My own letter was returned to me, and it is now at your ſervice, with the proper poſt-marks upon it,

and ſhall be ſent to you without delay, if you will inform me where it will really find you.

Your *Prefatory Addreſs* is dated Oxford-ſtreet, N° 418; but at that place no ſuch perſon could be heard of. There is alſo no name of a *publiſher* annexed to your work. How then can you ſay, as you do (ib. p. 21) that you have "ventured to ſubſcribe your "publication with your name, as well as I "do my *Letters*, to which your publica-"tion is an anſwer." If you enquire for me at Birmingham, as I did for you at Liverpool, I have no doubt but you will readily find me, and I aſſure you I ſhall be very glad to ſee you there.

As to your readineſs to ſuffer *martyrdom* in the cauſe of atheiſm, I hope you will never be put to the trial. But you muſt allow me to obſerve, that this oſtentatious profeſſion of your courage before hand, together with your deficiency in point of *ingenuouſneſs of mind*, in the inſtance above-mentioned, gives me no expectation that you would really ſtand it.

You ſeem to be apprehenſive of the *laws of this country*; but I know of no law that can affect you, except *one*, which equally affects myſelf. I mean the act of king William, which makes it *blaſphemy*, puniſhable by confiſcation of goods, and, if perſiſted in, impriſonment for life, either to deny that "any of the Three Perſons, the "Father, Son, or Holy Spirit, is God; or "to maintain that there are more Gods "than one." Of theſe three, I have not ſcrupled, on many occaſions, to deny the divinity of one, and the ſeparate exiſtence of another; ſo that if the law were executed, I ſhould ſuffer juſt the ſame as you, who deny the divinity of one of them, and the exiſtence of the other two.

I would not be underſtood to boaſt of my courage, though I have lived in the open violation of this law, even citing it, and cenſuring it about twenty years; becauſe I ſhould not have ventured to walk at large, as I have done, and now do, by the mere connivance of my countrymen, unprotected by any law, if I had not thought that I had

ſufficient

ſufficient reaſons to confide in their good-will, and to preſume on the improving *ſpirit of the times*. Without this ſecret perſuaſion, if I had publiſhed at all (in oppoſition to an article of faith, ſo guarded by laws and penalties) it would probably have been without my name; but I think I ſhould not have uſed any *falſe pretences*, or have made a parade of courage, which I really had not. I hope you will find that the people of this country, at leaſt, have made ſo much progreſs in that *melioration* of which you profeſs yourſelf to be a believer, as that an avowed *Atheiſt* has nothing more to fear than an avowed *Socinian*.

The religion that I profeſs hath never been more than barely *tolerated* by the civil power of any country, and very ſeldom ſo much as that. But in this circumſtance it more reſembles the kingdom of my maſter, which he declared to be *not of this world*.

I own I am ſo much impreſſed by this conſideration, that I do not wiſh that my religion may ever be in any other circumſtances, ſo as to receive any thing that can

be called *aid* or *countenance*, from worldly power. We have ſeen enough of a pretended *alliance between Church and State*. It has only contributed to debaſe the one, and enſlave the other.

It is alſo not perfectly of a piece with the *courage* to which you pretend, to endeavour to divert the reſentment of *Chriſtians*, by intimating, that *they* are not concerned in the queſtion. You ſay (*Advertiſement*, p. 5) "Revealed knowledge is not deſcanted upon, and therefore Chriſtians need take no "offence. Doubts upon natural religion "have not hitherto been looked upon as "attacks upon revelation, but rather as corroborations of it." And again (p. 7) "The religion eſtabliſhed in this country is "not the religion of nature, but the religion of Moſes and of Jeſus, with whom "the writer has nothing to do. He truſts, "therefore, he ſhall not be received as a "malevolent diſturber of ſuch common "opinions as are eſteemed to keep in order "a ſet of low wretches, ſo inclinable to be "lawleſs."

All

All this is manifeſtly diſingenuous. Do you really believe that chriſtianity is not affected by the belief or diſbelief of a God? What becomes of the divine miſſion of Moſes, or of Chriſt, if there be no ſuch being as that *God*, from whom they pretended to be ſent. You muſt know very well, that they are not ſuch doubts as theſe, that were ever thought to be any corroboration of revealed religion.

What could it be but *timidity*, and to avoid giving umbrage to the ruling powers, that led you to declare (ibid. p. 6) that you have no deſire to make converts, and to ſay (*Prefatory Addreſs*, p. 15) "I declare I am "rather pleaſed there are ſo few Atheiſts, "than at all anxious to make more. I "triumph in my ſuperior light. I and my "friend are ſo proud, in our ſingularity of "being atheiſts, that we will hardly open "our lips in company, when the queſtion "is ſtarted, for fear of making converts, "and ſo leſſening our own enjoyments, by a "numerous diviſion of our privilege with "others!"

Now I am at a loſs how to reconcile this either with your publiſhing any thing on the ſubject, or with the *benevolence* to which you likewiſe pretend in this publication, as "an attempt (*Advertiſement*, p. 7) to ſub-"ſtitute better foundations for morality," and with the idea of that *debaſement of mind*, which you frequently aſcribe to the belief of religion. If atheiſm be a good thing, with reſpect to yourſelf and your friends, why ſhould it not be equally good with reſpect to others, and from what good principle can you wiſh to confine the benefit to yourſelves only; and why ſhould you not both *ſpeak*, as well as *write*, and *ſuffer martyrdom* in the cauſe. If, on the other hand, religion be a thing valuable to ſociety at large, though it ſhould happen not to be ſo with reſpect to yourſelf, why do you not forbear to write, as well as to ſpeak againſt it. You ſay (*Prefatory Addreſs*, p. 15) that you are reſolved to make no reply to any anſwer I ſhall make to you; and that if I ſhould have the advantage in the argument, you will "bear my triumph without repining!" Yet

in

in the ſame page, you promiſe an anſwer to my intended letters in behalf of *revelation*. I really ſee no ſort of conſiſtency either with reſpect to *ſenſe*, or to *courage*, in this conduct of yours.

In general, I have no reaſon to complain of uncivil treatment from you; but it is not very handſome in you to put the interpretation that you do upon my ſaying, that I ſhall proceed with my *Letters to a philoſophical Unbeliever*, provided that thoſe which I have publiſhed be *well received*, when you ſay (*Prefatory Addreſs*, p. 14) "It is, in the "ſum total, juſt as much as if you had ſaid, "*provided this book ſells well, I will write* "*another.*"

It is true, as you ſay, that I have written many books, and if life and health be continued to me, I ſhall probably write more; but I can truly ſay (and the nature and complexion of my publications will not contradict it) that I have never yet written any thing ſolely, or principally, with a view to any advantage that might accrue from it; and ſeveral things, with a certainty of being

a loſer

a loſer. Not one of them was written to pleaſe a patron, to court the populace, or to recommend myſelf to any ſect of chriſtians. Certainly not thoſe of the eſtabliſhed church, and if poſſible, ſtill leſs thoſe of the ſame denomination with myſelf. It was even contrary to my own expectation, that, after ſome of my publications, I ſhould have met with any countenance from them. But they have had much more liberality, than I had preſumed upon. And my theological writings are certainly ill calculated to gain the applauſe of thoſe who are uſually ſtiled philoſophers. My object, I truſt, is the ſimple purſuit of truth, from the full perſuaſion, that the conſequence of this will be ultimately friendly to ſociety.

The ſale of a book is certainly one means of judging of its ſucceſs; but of this I can aſſure you, Sir, I have no reaſon to boaſt; for, inſtead of the *number of editions* you ſpeak of, not one, and that a very moderate one, hath yet been ſold. In other reſpects alſo, the event has been as little flattering. I do not know that my book

has

has converted a ſingle unbeliever; and if, as I hope, it has confirmed the faith of ſome, you ſay it hath contributed to the unhinging and overturning of yours. On no account, therefore, have I, as yet, any encouragement to proceed with this work, as I once intended. You have, however, no need to wait for the *continuation* of thoſe *Letters*, to which you promiſe an anſwer. I have really nothing material to add to what I have already advanced on the ſubject, in my *Inſtitutes of natural and revealed religion*. I could only expect to ſtate ſome parts of the evidences of revelation in a clearer and more unexceptionable light, and to reply with advantage to ſome particular objections. I beg, therefore, that you would reply to that work in the firſt place; and if you advance any thing that I ſhall think to be material, whether I write with more or leſs difficulty, you may depend upon an anſwer from me. I ſhall be happy to contribute any thing in my power to excite a more general attention to a ſubject of

ſo

ſo much importance; being perfectly ſatiſfied, that *truth*, which is all my object, will be a gainer by the diſcuſſion.

I am, Sir,

Your's, &c.

J. PRIESTLEY.

LETTER II.

Of the proper Proof of the Exiſtence of a GOD, *as an uncauſed Being.*

SIR,

AS you do not diſcuſs any of my arguments at large, but only deliver your own opinion, in a deſultory, but ſtriking manner, I do not know that I can reply to you in any better way, than by firſt bringing into a ſhort compaſs, and exhibiting in one connected view, the principal ſteps in my former arguments, to which you do not

appear

appear to me to have given ſufficient attention, notwithſtanding I am ſatisfied, from your quotations, that you have read my book. The *principles and modes of argumentation* are equally known to us both. I have endeavoured to explain them in my former *Letters*, and our *data* are contained in the ſame *face of nature*, which is equally open to our inſpection. Let us then conſider the different concluſions that we draw from the ſame premiſes.

To inſtance in ſome one part of the ſyſtem of nature, as a ſpecimen of the whole, I have obſerved, that from whatever reaſon we are led to conclude that a *teleſcope* required a maker, an *eye* muſt have required a maker alſo; ſince they are both of them equally mere *inſtruments*, adapted to anſwer a particular purpoſe. They, therefore, prove the exiſtence of what we call a *mind*, capable of perceiving that end or purpoſe, with a power of providing that means, and of adapting it to its end.

This mind muſt be a thing entirely foreign to the teleſcope, and conſequently

to

to the eye; it being as contrary to appearances that the eye ſhould make any part of this mind, as that the teleſcope ſhould.

In the ſame manner we are neceſſarily led to conclude, that the *animal* whoſe eye it is, is the production of ſome mind, or intelligent being (for every *power* is referred to ſome *ſubſtance*) foreign to itſelf, and alſo the *ſyſtem* of which that animal is a part, comprehending the whole *viſible univerſe*; each part of which bears a relation to the reſt, and therefore muſt derive its origin from a Being whoſe intelligence is capable of comprehending the whole.

The ſuppoſed *eternal generation* of one plant, or one animal from another, does not in the leaſt remove the difficulty of conceiving how any plant, or animal, ſhould have no foreign cauſe; becauſe there is nothing in any plant or animal, that is even capable of comprehending its own ſtructure; and much leſs have they the additional power of properly *producing* any thing like themſelves, and of enabling one of the

ſpecies

ſpecies to produce another. This has been the effect of an intelligence much ſuperior to theirs. How any thing that they do contributes to this end, is altogether unknown to them.

We are, therefore, in this train of ſpeculation, neceſſarily led to *one great intelligent Being*, capable both of *comprehending*, and of *producing* all the viſible univerſe. This Being muſt have exiſted from all eternity, without any foreign cauſe; for if it had had a beginning, it muſt have had a prior cauſe. We cannot, indeed, conceive *in what manner*, or *on what principles*, as we may ſay, ſuch a Being exiſts, or why it might not be, that he ſhould not have exiſted. But this does not affect the certainty, that ſuch a Being *does* exiſt, drawn from the certain exiſtence of what neceſſarily requires and proves it.

Nor is there any thing peculiar in this particular argument. In many other caſes we admit general *facts*, without pretending to have any idea of the *mode* or *manner* of their exiſtence. We have no idea at all how

how the principles of ſenſation and thought ſhould depend upon, or reſult from, the contexture of the brain; but as we know, from undeniable facts, that theſe properties, or powers, do reſult from that organization, we neceſſarily believe it, without having any farther diſtinct idea on the ſubject. In like manner we firmly believe, that there muſt have been an eternally exiſtent and intelligent Being, capable of producing the viſible univerſe, without having any farther idea how this ſhould be. This is not, ſtrictly ſpeaking, believing what is *incomprehenſible*, but what we *do* perfectly comprehend, though we perceive it is connected with ſomething that we are not able to comprehend. But as you lay particular ſtreſs on this ſubject, I ſhall enter a little farther into the diſcuſſion of it.

You ſay (*Prefatory Addreſs*, p. 32) "It "is impoſſible for an intellectual Being to "believe firmly in that of which he can "form no conception. I hold the deity, "the fancied deity, at leaſt, of whom, "with all his attributes, ſuch pompous "deſcriptions

" descriptions are set forth, to the great " terror of old women, and amusement of " young children, to be an object of which " we form (as appears when we scrutinize " into our ideas) no conception, and there- " fore can give no account." You also say, (p. 48) " All that Epicurus and Lucretius " have so greatly and convincingly said, is " swept away in a moment by these better " reasoners, who yet scruple not to declare, " with Dr. Priestley, that what they reason " about, is not the subject of human un- " derstanding. But let it be asked, is it " not absurd to reason with a man about " that, of which that same man asserts we " have no idea at all? Yet, will Dr. " Priestley argue, and say, it is of no im- " portance whether the person with whom " he argues, has a conception or not of the " subject. *Having no ideas includes no im-* " *possibility*; therefore, he goes on with his " career of words to argue about an unseen " Being, with another whom he will allow " to have no idea of the subject; and yet it " shall be of no avail in the dispute, whe-

"ther he has or no, or whether he is cap-
"able or incapable of having any. Rea-
"ſon failing, the paſſions are called upon,"
&c.

Let us now ſee whether the *career of words, without ideas*, be more juſtly laid to my charge or yours. In order to this, I wiſh, Sir, you would conſider what conception you have, or what account you can give of an uncauſed and eternally exiſtent univerſe, every ſeparate part of which bears undeniable marks of a deſign and intelligence, of which itſelf is not capable. If you only attend to the caſe, I think you will ſoon find that your ideas are far from being clear or ſatisfactory; notwithſtanding you ſay (p. 37) in general, that to ſuppoſe an "infinite ſucceſſion of finite cauſes, "is ſo far from being difficult, that a mind "not afraid to think, will find it the "moſt eaſy contemplation in the world to "dwell upon. It is probable," you ſay (p. 38) "that if one horſe had a cauſe, all "horſes had. But will not the argument "be more conſonant to itſelf, in ſuppoſing

"all

" all horſes had the ſame cauſe; and as one " is ſeen to be generated from a horſe and a " mare, ſo all were, from all eternity."

How this concluſion can appear *clear* and *ſatisfactory* to your mind, is to me not a little extraordinary, as it gives me no ſatisfaction at all. To me it is the very ſame thing as if, knowing nothing hiſtorically about the matter, a man ſhould find ſuch a city as *London*, and conclude that it had exiſted from eternity, juſt as it is, and had no foreign cauſe; or as if, without knowing any thing concerning the production of *horſes*, or of *men*, he ſhould conclude, that any *particular horſe*, or *man*, had exiſted from eternity, without any foreign cauſe. I do not ſee how theſe caſes differ; becauſe the whole *race of animals* ſhews the ſame marks of deſign, in the relation they bear to other parts of the ſyſtem, that the ſeveral parts of any individual Being bear to the reſt of its particular ſyſtem; and of a deſign of which they are themſelves incapable. Yet, ſhould any perſon affirm, concerning London, or concerning any par-

ticular horſe, or man, what you do not heſitate to affirm concerning the *whole ſpecies*, and concerning the *univerſe*, you would not ſcruple to ſay, that he talked without having any diſtinct conception or ideas, or without reaſoning conſequentially from them. For there is no objection againſt the independent exiſtence of the *individuals*, that does not equally lie againſt that of the *whole ſpecies*.

I am ready enough to acknowledge, that there is ſomething relating to an *independent firſt cauſe*, of which I can form no proper idea, that is, of which I have no knowledge. But this certainly implies no *contradiction*, any more than my ignorance concerning many other things, of the *exiſtence* of which I have no doubt. Every thing that I ſee, I ſuppoſe to have a cauſe foreign to itſelf, becauſe it is not capable of comprehending itſelf; and the whole *viſible univerſe*, in this reſpect, comes under the ſame deſcription with any plant or animal that is a part of it. But there is not this objection againſt the ſuppoſition of a

Being

Being that is capable of comprehending itſelf, and all things elſe, having exiſted without cauſe from all eternity, whatever other difficulties may attend the ſpeculation. If, than, you adopt that opinion which is preſſed with the leaſt difficulty, and is fartheſt removed from a manifeſt abſurdity, you muſt abandon that of the independent exiſtence of the *viſible univerſe*, and have recourſe to an *inviſible firſt cauſe*; which is the only alternative left you, in order to avoid the moſt palpable abſurdity.

As you may, perhaps, ſtill object (though you do not urge it very particularly) that the viſible univerſe itſelf, though bearing marks of deſign, may as well be conceived to have had no foreign cauſe, as that the cauſe of the univerſe ſhould have had none; I ſhall endeavour to ſtate more diſtinctly why I conceive that there is a very great difference in the two caſes.

The obvious reaſon why an *eye*, which is properly an inſtrument, or a means to gain a particular end, and alſo why the *animal* that is poſſeſſed of it, which is a *ſyſtem of*

means adapted to various ends, cannot have been uncauſed, is that they are not capable of comprehending themſelves. They are properly *contrivances*, and therefore, neceſſarily ſuppoſe a *contriver*, juſt as much as a *teleſcope* does, which comes under the ſame deſcription with the *eye*; being an inſtrument adapted to anſwer a particular purpoſe.

Conſequently, the mind can never reſt till it comes to a being poſſeſſed of that wonderful property, but of which we can have no diſtinct ideas, becauſe we are not poſſeſſed of it ourſelves, viz. *ſelf-comprehenſion*. And this Being muſt be ſo eſſentially different from all others, that, whereas they *muſt* be derived, this *may* be underived; and if it *may*, it will follow from other conſiderations, it abſolutely *muſt*. For the mind will always revolt at the idea of going back *ad infinitum*, through an infinite ſucceſſion of mere fine cauſes, whatever you may pretend to the contrary.

It is not pretended, as I have ſaid, that we can conceive, *a priori*, that a Being poſſeſſed

ſeſſed of ſelf-comprehenſion, muſt have been uncauſed: but as the mind cannot reſt till it arrives at ſuch a Being, and this is a circumſtance eſſentially different from that in which we find every other intelligent Being, it *may* be capable of ſelf-exiſtence, of which the others are not. Any real difference in the condition of theſe beings may be ſufficient to interrupt the analogy between them, ſo that we cannot be authoriſed to conclude concerning the one, what we do concerning the other. But theſe Beings differ in that very circumſtance on which the inference, that a *ſuperior cauſe is wanting*, depends. There muſt be ſome external cauſe of whatever is *limited*, or *finite*. We cannot conceive the poſſibility of its independent exiſtence. But whatever other difficulty attends the ſpeculation, we cannot ſay the ſame concerning a Being *unlimited* and *infinite*.

If any Being whatever bear marks of *deſign*, there muſt exiſt ſomewhere a *mind* capable of that deſign; and if it be not

capable of it itſelf, we muſt look for it in ſome other Being. But if that Being has within itſelf that perfect comprehenſion of itſelf, as well as of all things elſe that depend upon it, we have no longer the ſame motive to make any farther inquiries.—Such a Being as this may, for any thing we can prove to the contrary, have exiſted without cauſe, and from eternity. At the ſame time it muſt be acknowledged, as before, that, ſuppoſing no viſible univerſe to have exiſted, it is abſolutely inconceivable by us, on what principles, as we may ſay, ſuch a Being as the author of this viſible univerſe ſhould exiſt. But being ſenſible of the one, we are neceſſarily led to infer the other.

I am, &c.

LETTER

LETTER III.

Concerning the Seat of that Intelligence, which is conſpicuous in the viſible Univerſe.

SIR,

IN former times, thoſe who denied the being of a God, denied alſo that there was any proof of *intelligence*, or *deſign*, in the viſible univerſe. This, however, you readily admit; but you inſiſt upon it, that the *ſeat* of this intelligence and deſign, is in the viſible univerſe itſelf, and not in any Being foreign to it. On this ſubject you are ſufficiently explicit. "The *vis naturæ*," you ſay (*Prefatory Addreſs.* p. 28) "the "perpetual induſtry, intelligence, and pro-"viſion of nature, muſt be apparent to all "who ſee, feel, or think. I mean to diſ-"tinguiſh this active, intelligent, and de-"ſigning principle, inherent as much in "matter, as the properties of gravity, or "any elaſtic, attractive, or repulſive power,

"from

" from any extraneous foreign force and de-
" ſign, in an inviſible agent, ſupreme,
" though hidden lord, and maſter over all
" effects and appearances that preſent them-
" ſelves to us in the courſe of nature. The
" laſt ſuppoſition makes the univerſe, and
" all other organized matter, a machine,
" made or contrived by the arbitrary will of
" another Being, which other Being is cal-
" led *God*; and my theory makes a God of
" this univerſe, or admits no other God,
" or deſigning principle, than matter it-
" ſelf, and its various orgnizations."

I cannot help thinking, that when you attend to this hypotheſis, you muſt be ſatiſfied, that, on your own principles, it is abſolutely untenable. If it be the *marks of deſign* in the viſible univerſe, that compel you to admit there is *a principle of intelligence* belonging to it, this principle muſt be the *cauſe* of thoſe marks of deſign. But can you think this to be even *poſſible*, when you maintain, that every *cauſe* muſt neceſſarily be prior to its *effect*. Here an orderly ſyſtem pre-ſuppoſes intelligence, and yet

this

this intelligence ariſes from the order. If this be not what is called *arguing in a circle*, I do not know what is.

You may ſay, that the *univerſe*, and the *order* belonging to it (from which its principle of intelligence ariſes) were equally from eternity, and therefore, that the one is not prior to the other. But ſtill, independent of any *priority*, you make the ſame thing to be, at the ſame time, *cauſe* and *effect* with reſpect to itſelf. The cauſe of *intelligence* is ſtill that very *order*, or that *ſyſtem* which is produced by it.

To ſay that the whole viſible ſyſtem always exiſted as it now does, the *cauſe of its own order*, i. e. of itſelf, is a very different thing from ſaying that an inviſible author of nature had an eternal and neceſſary exiſtence. This is merely a thing, of which we have no *idea*, or *comprehenſion*, but what implies no more *contradiction*, than that *ſpace* or *duration* ſhould have been from eternity, and have been uncauſed; though in this caſe we cannot exclude the idea of them, or ſuppoſe them not to exiſt, and in the other we can.

Beſides

Beſides this capital defect in your hypotheſis, and which obliges us to have recourſe to that of an intelligent uncauſed Being, as the author of the viſible univerſe, I have no objection to examining the two hypotheſes by your own favourite teſt.

You ſay, as I have quoted before, "that "it is impoſſible for an intellectual Being "firmly to believe in that of which he can "give no account, or of which he can form "no conception." You believe, however, that this viſible univerſe, and the preſent courſe of nature, had no beginning; and as an atheiſt (believing nothing foreign to the ſyſtem of nature) you *muſt* believe it. But look a little into your own mind, and ſay, whether you have any clearer idea of *nature*, than you have of the *author of nature*, having had no beginning. If you be ingenuous, you muſt acknowledge, that you have no more conception of your own hypotheſis, than you have of mine; and therefore, that, in the very firſt inſtance, you gain nothing at all by it; being as much embarraſſed as ever with the neceſſary belief of ſomething,

which, in ſome reſpects, is abſolutely incomprehenſible to you.

Again, though you believe that there is a principle of intelligence and deſign in the viſible univerſe, can you ſay that you have any proper idea *how* this exquiſite deſign, that we ſee in the formation of plants and animals, &c. can poſſibly reſult from the conjoined action of ſuch things as the ſun, moon, and ſtars, earth, air, and water, &c. of which the viſible univerſe conſiſts, any more than of its belonging to a Being that is not the object of our ſenſes? In what reſpect, then, do you believe in things leſs incomprehenſible than I do? We muſt both equally acknowledge, that we are led by the moſt undeniable facts to believe what we clearly comprehend to be neceſſary to the exiſtence of thoſe facts, though we are both of us unavoidably led to ſpeculate farther on the ſubject, till we get into regions far beyond our clear conception.

Excluſive of all *matter*, and of *deity* alſo, can you even ſay that you have a diſtinct idea of *duration* itſelf having had no beginning;

ginning; or of a whole eternity being actually expired at the present moment? This you say (p. 30) is *an odd notion* of my own. But certainly that must be a proper *eternity*, or an *infinite duration*, which *exceeds all finite bounds*. Is it not thus that mathematicians always define *infinity*? Now, can you name, or write down, any number of *years*, or *periods of time*, that is not even infinitely exceeded by that *great period*, which is actually terminated by the present moment.

That the intelligence and design, which is apparent in the visible universe, should result from the several parts of this visible universe in conjunction, is so contrary to any analogy in nature, that whatever else we have recourse to, in order to account for it, this must be wholly inadmissible. And if a regular confutation of such a notion be at all difficult, the difficulty is of that kind which always attends the proving or disproving of such things as are almost self-evidently true or false.

The brain of a man, or of any other animal, is a homogeneous connected mass, and may

may as well be endued with the properties of *ſenſation and thought*, as a ſtone with that of *gravity*, or a load-ſtone with that of *magnetiſm*; there being only an equal difficulty in conceiving *how* ſuch powers can belong to, or depend upon, their reſpective ſubſtances. But in the viſible univerſe there is no ſuch homogeneity, or connexion of parts.

The *univerſe* at large, conſiſting of the different ſtars, and their reſpective ſyſtems of planets, have leſs apparent connexion than the *ſolar ſyſtem*; and the parts of this have a leſs intimate connexion than thoſe of any one of the planets, for inſtance, the *earth*, to which we belong, and which we have the beſt opportunity of examining. And yet, that the *earth*, conſiſting of land, water, and air, foſſils, plants, and animals, ſhould compoſe *one thinking ſubſtance*, is more incredible, than that a collection of buildings, called a *town*, ſhould have a principle of intelligence, with *ideas* and *thoughts*, ſuch as, by your own confeſſion, muſt have been in that which comprehended and pro-

duced

duced this ſyſtem. For whatever is capable of *deſign*, is univerſally termed *mind*, and muſt have *ideas* and *thoughts*, whether it be material or immaterial. There is an end of all our reaſoning concerning effects and cauſes, concerning marks of deſign and a principle of intelligence, if this concluſion may not be depended upon.

That principle of thought and intelligence, therefore, the marks of which cannot be denied to abound in the viſible univerſe, muſt belong to ſomething elſe than that univerſe. For, difficult as it may be to conceive, that there ſhould be an *inviſible Being* pervading the whole ſyſtem, and attentive to all things in it, and that this Being ſhould have exiſted without any foreign cauſe, the ſuppoſition, though ever ſo confounding to the imagination, is leſs difficult than the contrary; and one or other of them *muſt* be admitted.

You allow (p. 42) that there is in nature a principle of *production*, as well as of *deſtruction*; ſo that, "whenever the globe "ſhall come to that temperament, which "is

"is fit for the life of any loſt ſpecies of "animals, whatever energy in nature pro- "duced it originally, if ever it had a be- "ginning, will moſt probably be ſufficient "to produce it again. Is not," you ſay, "the reparation of vegetable life in the "ſpring, equally wonderful now as its firſt "production? yet this is a plain effect of "the influence of the ſun, whoſe abſence "would occaſion death, by a perpetual win- "ter? So far is this queſtion from con- "taining, in my opinion, a formidable dif- "ficulty to the Epicurean ſyſtem, that I "cannot help judging the continual muta- "bility of things, as an irrefragable proof "of this eternal energy of nature."

To me the concluſion which you think ſo very probable, appears to be drawn directly contrary to all the known rules of philoſophizing. Suppoſing, as you do, the cauſe of deſtruction to any ſpecies of animals, to be a change of temperature in the climate, ſtill the re-production of thoſe animals, when the country ſhould have recovered its former temperature, would be as

proper a *miracle* as any thing to which a a believer in revelation gives that name (and would, therefore, prove the exiſtence of a power diſtinct from any thing in the viſible univerſe, and ſuperior to it) becauſe we ſee nothing ſimilar to this in any ſimilar circumſtances of things at preſent. Take a veſſel of water, with fiſhes and inſects in it. You may freeze that water, and conſequently deſtroy all the animals that it contains. But though you may thaw that water again, you might wait long enough before you would find any more ſuch fiſhes or inſects in it, provided you excluded the ſpawn, or eggs, of others.

If there be any ſuch thing as the reproduction of any loſt animal, as of that large one, the bones of which you ſpeak of (p. 41) and there be no ſuch thing as a being diſtinct from the viſible univerſe, it muſt be produced by what now exiſts, and is viſible to us; but how this ſhould be done by any *law* or *power of nature*, with which we are acquainted (and beyond this we are not authorized to form any judg-

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ment at all) though, within your creed, is beyond my conception. As the animal you ſpeak of was an inhabitant of the *earth*, I ſhould imagine that you would think ſome power reſiding in, and belonging to, the earth itſelf might be ſufficient for this purpoſe, without calling in the aid of the ſun, moon, or ſtars. But how the earth, with all the animals and men upon it, are to go to work, in order to re-produce this animal, I have no knowledge. I know that I ſhould be able to contribute very little towards it. *The energy of nature, before which*, you ſay (p. 41) *all difficulty vaniſhes*, is a fine expreſſion; but when we come to realize our ideas, and to conceive in what manner this energy of nature is to be exerted, we are juſt as much at a loſs how to connect it with the things to be produced by it, as if no ſuch energy exiſted.

You ſay that "the reparation of vegetable life in the ſpring, is equally as wonderful now as at its firſt production," and that this, "is the plain effect of the influ-

"ence of the ſun." I am really ſurprized that you can, even for a moment, ſuppoſe theſe two caſes to be at all ſimilar. We can only judge of *powers* by *obſervation* and *experience*. Now, whenever did you ſee any plant produced when the ſeed was properly deſtroyed? In this caſe, what can the *ſun* do to produce it. If the ſun has this power, why is it not ſometimes exerted, ſo that we ſhould ſee plants ſpring up by means of *heat* only, without their proper ſeeds? That there is a Being diſtinct from the viſible univerſe, poſſeſſed of the power of controuling its laws, is not a random ſuppoſition, like this of yours, but is ſufficiently proved by *fact*, as the hiſtory of revelation ſhews.

I am, Sir,

Yours, &c.

LETTER

LETTER IV.

Of the Proof of the Being and Attributes of GOD, *from Revelation.*

SIR,

I SHALL now venture to urge another argument, hinted at in the concluſion of the laſt letter, for the belief of a deity, as a Being diſtinct from the viſible univerſe, which you will not deny to be adapted to affect the minds of the *vulgar*; and if it be attended to, it cannot, I think, fail to give ſatisfaction, even to philoſophical perſons, and muſt contribute to remove any doubts that may have been occaſioned by metaphyſical ſpeculations on the ſubject. The evidence I mean, is that of *miracles*, which, if they be undeniable, clearly prove the exiſtence of a Being diſtinct from what is viſible in nature, and a Being who can controul the laws of it; and this can be no other than the *author of Nature*.

The evidences of revealed religion are generally conſidered as *ſubſequent* to thoſe of natural religion, and both of them are generally treated of as altogether independent of each other. But as revelation ſuppoſes the being of a God, whoſe will is revealed to us, ſo the hiſtorical proof of actual interruptions in the uſual courſe of nature, in the viſible univerſe, is a diſtinct proof of the exiſtence of a power foreign to the viſible univerſe itſelf, and capable of controuling it. And if there be marks of *deſign* in ſuch interpoſitions, if they be intended to anſwer ſome purpoſe, and ſome benevolent purpoſe, they are diſtinct proofs of the *intelligence* and *benevolence* of that foreign power. And that there have been ſuch interruptions in the courſe of nature, we have, in my opinion, abundantly ſufficient evidence. It is clear to me, that, all things conſidered, the man who diſbelieves this evidence, muſt believe things much more extraordinary, and even more contrary to preſent appearances (as I think I have ſhewn

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in my *Inſtitutes of natural and revealed religion*) than thoſe which he rejects.

Such interpoſitions, in which the author of nature is exhibited as communicating his will to men, by the uſe of *language*, &c. is better adapted to give us an idea of a *character*, of a *diſpoſition of mind*, and even of *deſign*, than the ſettled and regular courſe of nature; though, to a reflecting mind, this does not fail to ſuggeſt the ſame thing. Let any man, the moſt ſceptical in the world, be ſuppoſed to have been preſent when Moſes heard the voice diſtinctly pronouncing the words, *I am the God of Abraham, Iſaac, and Jacob*, &c. promiſing to bring his people out of Egypt, &c. and then to have paſſed through the red ſea along with them, and alſo to have heard an audible voice pronouncing every word of the ten commandments from mount Sinai: or let a perſon be ſuppoſed to have heard the words which, in the courſe of the evangelical hiſtory, were three times audibly pronounced, but proceeding from no viſible Being, *This is my beloved Son, hear ye him*;

let him have heard Jeſus invoke that inviſible Being, and immediately afterwards raiſe Lazarus from the dead; and eſpecially let him have converſed with Jeſus after he had been publicly crucified and buried: I ſay, let us ſuppoſe any perſon whatever to have been preſent at any of theſe extraordinary ſcenes, ſo as not to be able to deny that aſtoniſhing changes in the laws of nature had really taken place; and then let us ſuppoſe it poſſible for him to deny the exiſtence of a Being diſtinct from what we call *nature*, or the *viſible univerſe*, and capable of controuling its laws, if we can.

Moreover, if this great inviſible Being, who at his pleaſure controuled the laws of nature, and thereby proved himſelf to be equal to the eſtabliſhment of them, announced himſelf to be the *author of nature*, and always aſſumed that character; can we ſuppoſe it poſſible that any perſon who really believed ſuch miraculous interpoſitions, ſhould entertain a doubt that there was an inviſible author of nature, diſtinct from any thing that he could ſee in it? It

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is evident, therefore, that the miracles recorded in the Old and New Teſtaments are naturally adapted to give the fulleſt ſatisfaction concerning the being of a God, as well as of the truth of revelation; and, therefore, that in order to diſprove the being of a God, a perſon muſt likewiſe diſprove the evidence of the Jewiſh and of the chriſtian revelations, which I think he will find it difficult to do, conſiſtently with his retaining faith in any hiſtory whatever. But this is not my preſent buſineſs, farther than to point out the connexion between the evidences of natural and revealed religion, and to ſhew what you have to do before you can effectually refute either of them.

I ſhall conclude this letter with ſhewing, that, admitting what you profeſs to do concerning the viſible univerſe, the *intelligence* and the *energy of nature*, you may admit the whole ſyſtem of revelation; ſo that, in fact, you have conceded rather more than you intended.

If you admit an *intention*, or *deſign*, in nature, you cannot exclude the idea of what

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we call *character*, and proper *perſonality*, whether it belong to a Being diſtinct from the viſible univerſe, or to the viſible univerſe itſelf; and admitting this, the whole ſyſtem of revelation may follow. And this, in fact, is all that I am ſolicitous about, becauſe it is all that I am affected by, as it implies every thing on which my hopes or fears are founded.

The power, or principle, that formed the eye, with a view to enable us to ſee diſtant objects, and which for excellent purpoſes eſtabliſhed all the laws of nature, may alſo for the beſt of purpoſes, have occaſionally controuled them. That power which formed the organs of ſpeech, may itſelf have ſpoken from mount Sinai, and have given mankind an aſſurance of a reſurrection from the dead by Jeſus Chriſt.

It is this *power*, or *principle*, in whatever it reſides, that commands my homage and obedience. It is *properties* and *powers*, and not *ſubſtance*, that I pretend to have any concern with. But I think it contrary to analogy, and the rules of juſt reaſoning, to

ſuppoſe

ſuppoſe theſe powers to reſide in the viſible univerſe; and therefore I prefer the hypotheſis which aſcribes them to an inviſible Being, diſtinct from it.

If you admit a principle of intelligence, and a power of *production* and *reproduction* in nature, you are prepared to admit all the facts on which the ſyſtem of revelation is founded; and whether they be true or falſe, is a thing to be determined by *hiſtorical evidence*. If, as you ſay, "a future life be certainly deſirable;" if you "firmly wiſh for "it, and are determined to live as if there "was one:" If immorality, as you alſo ſay (*Prefatory Addreſs*, p. 10) has not preceded your unbelief, and will not follow it, I have no doubt but that, by giving due attention to this evidence, you will again become a believer, and a chriſtian. But then, I think you will not long retain your preſent hypotheſis, of a principle of intelligence and deſign reſiding in, and properly belonging to, the viſible univerſe; as there will then be no conceivable reaſon why you

ſhould

ſhould not believe, and rejoice in the belief of a ſupreme Being, or of a maker and a moral governor of the univerſe, as well as myſelf.

I am, Sir,

Your's, &c.

LETTER V.

Of the moral attributes of the Deity.

SIR,

AS to the *moral attributes* of the deity, viz. his *benevolence* and his *juſtice*, I ſhall not enter very far into the argument at preſent, not thinking that what I advanced before is at all invalidated by your merely aſſerting the contrary.

You ſay (p. 22) "Take a view of human "exiſtence, and who can even allow that "there is more happineſs than miſery in "the world." I ſhould think that you yourſelf allow it, when you ſpeak (p. 27)

of a future life (expecting it, I ſuppoſe, to reſemble this) as *deſirable*. However, the bulk of mankind, I doubt not, enjoy, and value their preſent exiſtence. I do for one. You allow (p. 4) that the condition of man is in a ſtate of *melioration*, and if this be the caſe, though happineſs ſhould not preponderate over miſery at preſent, it is ſure to do ſo in due time; ſo that, looking forward to the whole of things, the argument for the goodneſs of God, with reſpect to mankind at leaſt, is quite ſatisfactory. "Who," you ſay (p. 22) "will ever reſolve the queſtion, "if evil and pain be good and neceſſary "now, why they will not always be ſo?" I anſwer, this may be the caſe in ſome degree, and yet be conſiſtent enough with the proper meaning of the figurative deſcriptions of a future life in the ſcriptures. If you admit the doctrine of *melioration*, you muſt admit that, if we continue to exiſt, all evil will gradually vaniſh; and I think that, on the principles of Dr. Hartley's Theory of the Mind, I could ſhew, in ſome meaſure, *why* it will be ſo; but the diſcuſſion would be too long for this place.

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Your argument againſt the belief of a God, at leaſt of a juſt and righteous Being, on account of his not interpoſing to puniſh vice, and eſpecially thoſe who deny his exiſtence, ſeems to me very unworthy of any perſon pretending to reaſon. "If that "wiſhed-for interpoſition of the deity is "put off to a future exiſtence, you ſay "(*Prefatory Addreſs*, p. 30) I cannot help "obſerving, that future day has been al-"ready a long while waited for in vain, "and any delay deſtroys ſome one attribute "or other of the deity. He wants juſtice, "or he wants the power, or the will, to do "good and be juſt. Shall ſuch a tremen-"dous Being," you ſay (p. 49) "with ſuch "a care for the creatures he has made, ſuf-"fer his own exiſtence to be a perpetual "doubt? If the courſe of nature does not "give ſufficient proof, why does not the "hand divine ſhew itſelf by an extraordi-"nary interpoſition of power? It is al-"lowed miracles ought not to be cheap, or "plenty. One or two, at leaſt, every "thouſand years, might be admitted. But "this is a perpetual ſtanding miracle, that

"ſuch

" ſuch a Being as the depicted God, the " author of nature, and all its works, ſhould " exiſt, and yet his exiſtence be perpetually " in doubt, or require a Jeſus, a Mahomet, " or a Prieſtley, to reveal it. Is not the " writing of this very anſwer to the laſt of " thoſe three great luminaries of religion, a " proof that no God, or no ſuch God, at " leaſt, exiſts? Hear the admirable words " of the author of the *Syſteme de la Nature*, " HOW CAN HE SUFFER A MORTAL LIKE " ME TO QUESTION HIS RIGHTS, HIS TI- " TLES, AND EVEN HIS EXISTENCE?"

This, Sir, I think to be as weak as (if I may be allowed one harſh expreſſion) it is arrogant. You, and the author of the work you quote, muſt have a very high opinion, indeed, of your own importance, and of the force of your writings, to imagine that a *miracle* is requiſite to confute them. I truſt that ſomething far ſhort of this will be abundantly ſufficient for the purpoſe, with reſpect to mankind at large; and, as to your own particular conviction, it may be no very great object with the author of the univerſe.

univerſe. His wiſe general laws, and the excellent maxims of his government, may admit a much greater partial evil than that, and make it ſubſervient to good. The wiſdom of God will, I doubt not, appear moſt conſpicuous when it ſhall be ſeen, that ſufficient proviſion was made two thouſand years ago, for remedying all the evils, which, from foreign cauſes, have been introduced into the ſyſtem of religion ſince that time. Chriſtianity, I am confident, will be able, without the aid of any more miracles, to free itſelf from all its impurities, and command the aſſent of all the world; even the learned and moſt ſceptical not excluded.

As to your calling upon the divine Being to vindicate himſelf from your impiety, any wiſe and merciful ſovereign, who ſhould allow his ſubjects a proper time for forming their characters and conduct, before he thought proper to interpoſe, in order to reward or puniſh them, might be inſulted in the ſame manner by weak and impatient minds. If there be any ſuch thing as a

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ſtate of trial and *diſcipline*, ſome *delay* in adminiſtering juſtice muſt be admitted; and of what continuance that ought to be, there may be better judges than you, or the author of *the Syſteme de la Nature*.

If you meant to pay me any compliment by claſſing me with *Jeſus* and *Mahomet*, I muſt obſerve, that, to ſay nothing farther, it is a very aukward one. They (the one juſtly, and the other unjuſtly) pretended to divine communications, which you muſt know I never did.

I am, SIR, yours, &c.

LETTER VI.

Of the moral Influence of Religion.

SIR,

YOU greatly miſconceive, or miſ-ſtate the influence of religion, when you ſay (p. 43) "all that the belief of a God

" and of a providence can in reality pro-
" duce, ſcarce goes beyond ſome exterior
" exerciſes, which are vainly thought to
" reconcile man to God. It may make
" men build temples, ſacrifice victims, of-
" fer up prayers, or perform ſomething of
" the like nature; but never break a cri-
" minal intrigue, reſtore ill-gotten wealth,
" or mortify the luſt of man——If no other
" remedy were applied to vice than the re-
" monſtrances of divines, a great city, ſuch
" as London, would in a fortnight's time
" fall into the moſt horrid diſorder.——
" Religion may make men follow ceremo-
" nies: little is the inconvenience found in
" them. A great triumph truly for reli-
" gion to make men baptize, or faſt. When
" did it make men do virtuous actions for
" virtue's ſake, or practice fewer inventions
" to get rich, where riches would not be
" acquired without poverty to others? The
" true principle moſt commonly ſeen in hu-
" man actions, and which philoſophy will
" cure ſooner than religion, is the natural
" inclination of man for pleaſure, or a taſte

" contracted for certain objects by prejudice " and habit. Theſe prevail in whatſoever " faith a man is educated, or with whatever " knowledge he may ſtore his mind."

Confident as you ſeem to be of your advantage on this head. I have no doubt but that, if I may oppoſe one aſſertion to another, religion has gained the end that you propoſe, viz. to *do virtuous actions for virtue's ſake*, far more generally, and much more effectually, than philoſophy has ever done; and that it hath carried men much higher in the path of virtue than you have even an idea of, if by the man who does virtuous actions *for virtue's ſake*, you mean that *great and good man*, deſcribed in your Prefatory Addreſs (p. 33) who *loves virtue becauſe he finds a pleaſure in it*. For this is far from being any heroic or noble principle. It is only a more refined ſelfiſhneſs. Whereas religion teaches men to love others as themſelves, and implicitly to obey God and their conſciences, as ſuch, without any ſiniſter view whatever. However, notwith-

ſtanding this, it is with the greateſt wiſdom that the hope of reward, and the fear of puniſhment, are propoſed to us. If you have made any obſervations on the human mind, you muſt know that, with or without the belief of a God, men always begin to act from the ſimpleſt and loweſt motives; and that it is only by degrees, and the force of habit, that theſe motives loſe their influence, and that men become capable of acting from more generous and diſintereſted principles. If you be ignorant of this, you have much to learn, but you will find it admirably explained by Dr. Hartley, to whom I refer you on the ſubject.

It is by ſlow degrees that a child comes to love even his nurſe, or his parents. At firſt, he loves his food and his play much more; but in time he becomes capable of ſacrificing both, and even his life, and not only to ſerve them, but alſo his country and mankind. Though, therefore, religion begins with the *fear of God*, and the *hope of heaven*, at length *perfect love caſteth out fear*, and

and the true chriſtian *loves the Lord his God with all his heart* (being wholly devoted to his will) *and his neighbour as himſelf.*

Religion, if I have any idea of its nature and practical tendency, is a very different thing from what you ſuppoſe it to be. By extending our views to the certain proſpect of a future and better life, it muſt, in proportion as its principles are attended to, give a man a higher idea of his *perſonal importance*, and of the *conſequence of his actions*; and, in fact, will make him a ſuperior kind of Being to the man who believes that his exiſtence will cloſe in a few years, and may terminate to-morrow. You ſay (p. 46) that "an atheiſt, feeling himſelf to be a link in "the grand chain of nature, feels his rela-"tive importance, and dreads no imaginary "Being;" but a theiſt, and a believer in revelation, conceives himſelf to be a much more important link in the ſame grand chain of nature, and therefore will feel himſelf more concerned to act a part worthy of his rank and ſtation. If he *fears*, it is only that great Being, who is the proper object

of fear, and then only when his righteous will is not obeyed; and his *hope*, which is certainly a delightful and valuable principle, muſt be allowed to be infinitely ſuperior to any thing that an atheiſt can pretend to.

Beſides, upon your own principles, you cannot deny that religion *muſt* have great practical influence, if it be really believed, ſo long as mankind are governed by hopes and fears. Why is it that the *laws* and the *gallows*, as you ſay, keep in order ſuch a city as London, but that men fear detection, and dread pain and death. But a real believer in revelation well knows that, if he act wickedly, he can never eſcape detection, and that he has much more to fear than man can inflict upon him. How is it poſſible, then, that men ſhould not be influenced by it? I make no doubt but that its practical influence is very great, and even that it weighs ſomething with thoſe who profeſs to diſclaim it. Indeed, human nature muſt be a thing very different from what we know it to be, if the principles of religion, firmly

believed

believed (as, no doubt, they are by many) have no real influence. No man, acquainted with hiſtory, or with common life, can deny the influence either of *enthuſiaſm*, or of *ſuperſtition*, which are only perverſions of religion.

You do not heſitate to ſay (*Prefatory Addreſs*, p. 21) that "whatever advantage "religion hath had in the enumeration of "its martyrs, the cauſe of atheiſm may "boaſt the ſame," and you mention Vanini as a martyr for atheiſm. I will not diſpute the point with you, but I think I have read an account of Vanini, which repreſents him as not having been properly an atheiſt, as not having had the power of recantation at the ſtake, and as ſuffering with more reluctance than has been ſometimes given out; all which circumſtances make his caſe much leſs to your purpoſe. But admitting all that you can wiſh with reſpect to it, very little, we know, is to be inferred from the conduct of any *ſingle perſon*, becauſe he may be influenced by motives which will have little weight with the generality of mankind.

On the contrary, it muſt be ſomething adapted to influence *human nature in general*, and cannot but have real moment in the conduct of men, that can produce ſuch liſts of ready and chearful martyrs as chriſtianity can boaſt; men of all countries, of all ages, and of every rank and condition in life, and differing from one another in as many circumſtances (and eſpecially in the belief of particular doctrines) as you can name; while they have agreed in nothing beſides the ſimple *profeſſion of chriſtianity*, and the belief of *a future life of retribution*. There can be no doubt, therefore, but that, ſince the ſame cauſes will always produce the ſame effects, a time of perſecution would now call forth as many martyrs as ever. Surely then, if we may judge from obſervation, as philoſophers ought to do, we muſt be convinced, that there is ſomething in *this belief* that is adapted to affect the hearts and lives of men, and that in the greateſt and happieſt manner.

Should you yourſelf ſuffer martyrdom in the cauſe of atheiſm, as you expreſs your readineſs to do, p. 21. (but in which few will

will believe you to be in earneſt, becauſe, with your proſpects, they will think you a fool for ſo doing) it will contribute very little to impreſs mankind in general in favour of your principles, and though you may poſſibly have ſome admirers, I will venture to ſay, you will have few followers. Unbelievers, of my acquaintance, make no ſcruple of conforming to any thing that the ſtate requires; and, I am confident, would be the firſt to laugh at you, if they were to ſee you going to the ſtake.

I am, SIR,

Yours, &c.

LETTER VII.

Miſcellaneous Obſervations.

SIR,

I DO not care to animadvert upon all thoſe paſſages in your anſwer, in which you ſeem to have miſtaken my meaning; but

but I muſt take notice of one or two of them.

It is not fair in you to ſay, as you ſeem to do (p. 25) that becauſe I have endeavoured to prove that an atheiſt cannot be quite ſure that there will be no future ſtate, I therefore allow that "the courſe of nature might be as it is without a God, and "therefore that there is no natural proof "of a deity." What then, Sir, was my object in thoſe Letters, to which you have made a reply? Was it not to unfold and exhibit the natural proof of a deity? Do you infer whatever you pleaſe from my writings, but do not inſinuate that I myſelf, infer, or allow it.

You charge me very unjuſtly (*Prefatory Addreſs*, p. 29) with giving up a *particular providence*, and you ſay you give it up too; whereas I only deny thoſe *frequent miraculous interpoſitions*, which ſome have ſuppoſed. But, notwithſtanding this, I believe that every thing, and every event, in the whole compaſs of nature, was originally appointed to fit its proper place; and this

you

you yourſelf muſt alſo admit, if you acknowledge a principle of *intelligence* and *deſign* in the univerſe. For this cannot be limited to ſome things only, but muſt extend to all. Beſides, the greateſt things have the ſtricteſt connexion with, and dependence upon, the ſmalleſt.

If, which you allow, there was a real *deſign* in the original production of things, and in the eſtabliſhment of the laws of nature, there muſt likewiſe have been *a foreſight* of whatever would happen in conſequence of thoſe laws, and therefore a proper adjuſtment of all events to one another; ſo that you cannot admit a proper intelligence in nature, without admitting the doctrine of a particular providence. Indeed, Sir, you ſhould not have abandoned the old atheiſtical principle of *chance*, and have admitted *deſign* in nature, without attending to all the conſequences of this principle. Only purſue that principle conſiſtently, and you will ſoon come to believe all that I do.

You

You conſider it as a falſe aſſertion (p. 5) that "a cauſe need not be prior to its ef-"fect." Now many *ſecondary cauſes* cannot be conceived to exiſt a moment without producing their proper effects, as the ſun without giving light, a magnet without attracting iron, &c. This, therefore, *may* be the caſe with the *original cauſe* of all things; ſo that his works, as well as himſelf, may have been from all eternity. This, however, I have only mentioned, as what may perhaps be a more probable ſuppoſition, than that the divine Being ſhould have exiſted a whole eternity, without creating any other Being. But this opinion is not neceſſarily connected with the ſimple proof of the Being of a God.

It may not be amiſs to take ſome notice of what you ſay with reſpect to *authority*, in the queſtion we are diſcuſſing. I am as far as you can be from laying much ſtreſs on mere authority in matters of *ſpeculation* and *reaſoning*, though it is impoſſible for any man not to be more or leſs influenced by it. But I can by no means think

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with you (*Prefatory Addreſs*, p. 24) that "modern philoſophers are nearly all atheiſts." Indeed, if this be the caſe, there muſt, by your account, be very few in this country, at leaſt you are not acquainted with many of them; and therefore, from your perſonal knowledge, can have no authority for the aſſertion. For you ſay (ib. p. 16) you know of none beſides *yourſelf* and *your friend*, the joint authors of this anſwer to my Letters. I am ready, however, to allow that what you ſay may be nearly true with reſpect to France and Italy, though I believe it is by no means the caſe, as yet, in England; and if you confine yourſelf to thoſe who have really advanced the bounds of natural knowledge, and who have diſtinguiſhed themſelves the moſt in the character of *philoſophers*, you will not, I think, find ſo many atheiſts among them, in any country, as you may have ſuppoſed.

You mention Hume, Helvetius, Diderot, and D'Alembert; but I do not remember to have heard of any diſcoveries in natural or moral ſcience made by any of them.

them. This I do not ſay to inſult them, or to inſinuate that they are not entitled to the reputation they have gained, though I ſcruple not to avow this with reſpect to Mr. Hume. They have their excellencies, but they are of a different kind. Some of them are mathematicians, but, properly ſpeaking, I do not know that any of them are to be allowed a rank, at leaſt any high rank, among philoſophers. In a general way of ſpeaking, indeed, it may be proper enough to call any perſon a philoſopher, who only gives his attention to the ſubject of philoſophy, and is acquainted with the diſcoveries of others; but when you mentioned particular names, as thoſe of perſons known to the world in the character of philoſophers, and eſpecially ſo few as *four*, you ſhould have ſelected thoſe who had made important diſcoveries of their own. You can hardly think it ſufficient to entitle a man to the rank of a *philoſopher*, that he is merely *an unbeliever in natural or revealed religion**.

* As what I have ſaid concerning Mr. Hume in this place, may be miſunderſtood, and be thought to be invidious, I ſhall add, what

As to what you are pleaſed to ſay (ib. p. 24) I myſelf might have been, if I had not "from my firſt initiation into ſcience, "being dedicated to what is called the "immediate ſervice of God," it is a thing that cannot be known, except to my maker. It is evident, that you have little knowledge of my hiſtory, nor is it of any importance to the world that it ſhould be known. I have, however, been more than once, and for a conſiderable length of time, near fourteen years in all, out of what you, in ridicule, call the *immediate ſervice of God*, after I had been ſeveral years engaged in it; and now, without having any reaſon to complain of age or infirmity, and in preference perhaps to more lucrative purſuits, I have, from pure choice, reſumed it; and I hope

what I have taken ſeveral opportunities of ſaying before, viz. that I am far from thinking, that it requires great mental powers to make diſcoveries in natural philoſophy. They have generally been made by accident. But as Mr. Hammon ſeemed willing to avail himſelf of the authority of *philoſophers*, I have only obſerved, that, be their merit what it may, that kind of authority, ſtrictly ſpeaking, and when the term is properly defined, makes very little for him; not many of thoſe who have diſtinguiſhed themſelves in that way, having been atheiſts.

to

to continue in it as long as I ſhall be capable of doing the duties of it.

Sincerely wiſhing that you may come to ſee the ſubject of our diſcuſſion in the ſame light with myſelf, and thereby attain to the ſame perfect ſatisfaction in your purſuits and proſpects that I have in mine,

I am, Sir,

Your very humble ſervant,

BIRMINGHAM,
May, 1782.

J. PRIESTLEY.

LETTERS

TO A

PHILOSOPHICAL UNBELIEVER.

PART II.

CONTAINING

A State of the Evidence of revealed Religion, with Animadverſions on the two laſt Chapters of the firſt Volume of *Mr. Gibbon's Hiſtory of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire.*

By JOSEPH PRIESTLEY, LL.D. F.R.S.

AC. IMP. PETROP. R. PARIS. HOLM. TAURIN. AUREL. MED. PARIS. HARLEM. CANTAB. AMERIC. ET PHILAD. SOCIUS.

——— Ne te auferat ebrius ardor,
Neu clauſos radiis oculos opponat apertis.
Utere mente tua. Procul anticipata repelle
Judicia; et recto librans examine lances,
Hanc demum, audita cauſa, complectere partem,
Quam mens, et ratio veri ſtudioſa, probabit.

ANTI LUCRETIUS.

BIRMINGHAM,
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MDCCLXXXVII.

THE

PREFACE.

IT is with much ſatisfaction that I have now completed this ſeries of *Letters*, in which I have advanced what appears to me to be the beſt calculated to remove the objections of philoſophical perſons to the evidences of natural and revealed religion.

In this diſcuſſion, I flatter myſelf, that I have ſome advantage over thoſe who have hitherto treated the ſame ſubject, both with reſpect to what I have undertaken to defend, and the mode in which the defence is conducted. The articles that I undertake to defend are more conſonant to reaſon, and my proof of them reſts on the ſame principles on which all philoſophical inveſtigations proceed; ſo that, if I do not deceive myſelf, I have brought the queſtions concerning

the being of a God, the truth of his moral government here, and the certainty of a life of retribution to come (which are the great principles of all religion) into a ſtate in which it will be more eaſy to come to a fair iſſue with unbelievers, and to decide whether there be ſufficient ground for our faith in them, or not.

With reſpect to both natural and revealed religion, all that we have to do, is to conſider whether *actual appearances*, and known *facts*, can be accounted for on any other hypotheſis. In natural religion the appearances to be accounted for are *the conſtitution and laws of nature*. In revealed religion, they are certain *hiſtorical facts*, as indiſputable as any natural appearances. They are the belief of the miracles of Moſes and of Chriſt, and that of his reſurrection, in given circumſtances. As appearances in nature cannot, I apprehend, be accounted for without admitting an intelligent author of nature, diſtinct from nature itſelf, and alſo that this author of nature is a benevolent and righteous Being;

Being; ſo the ſimple fact, of the belief of the great events on which depends the truth of the divine miſſions of Moſes and of Chriſt, cannot, I apprehend, be accounted for, without admitting the reality of thoſe events.

To this particular ſtate of the queſtion, I have endeavoured to confine myſelf in this ſecond ſeries of Letters, referring the reader for the diſcuſſion of many things relating to the evidence of revelation to more ſyſtematical works, and to that ſhort view of the whole compaſs of it, which will be found in my *Inſtitutes of natural and revealed Religion*.

In this ſecond part of my work I have conſidered the divine miſſions of Moſes and of Chriſt as proved by exactly ſimilar arguments, but with little regard to their connexion; and to this *ſimilarity of arguments* I earneſtly wiſh to draw the attention of learned and candid *Jews*; being confident that, when once they ſhall truly underſtand the ground on which they ought to receive, and

muſt defend, the divine miſſion of Moſes, they will be convinced that they muſt alſo admit the truth of the divine miſſion of Chriſt; and this being admitted, they will ſoon acknowledge that every other objection to chriſtianity, on which they have laid any ſtreſs, muſt fall to the ground.

Thoſe Jews with whom I have converſed, or correſponded, though they firmly believe what they have been taught concerning the truth of their religion, do not appear to me to have a ſufficiently diſtinct apprehenſion of the true ground of their own faith, or what arguments they muſt allege in order to convince an unbeliever, that Moſes had a divine miſſion, and that he worked real miracles in proof of it. A previous controverſy with unbelievers would ſhow them the ground on which they muſt ſtand; and then, I think, they muſt clearly perceive, that the truth of the divine miſſion of Chriſt, ſtands more firmly and unexceptionably on the ſame ground, in conſequence of the origin of chriſtianity being nearer to

our

our own times, and more within the compaſs of acknowledged hiſtory.

I therefore wiſh that the Jews, to whom I have addreſſed a ſeries of *Letters*, would conſider this work as an appendage to them, having the ſame object with reſpect to *them*, viz. as unbelievers in chriſtianity. They will, I flatter myſelf, receive ſome ſatisfaction from ſeeing in them a clear ſtate of the evidences of their own religion; and I am not acquainted with any writings of their own, in which this is given, or attempted. Being well grounded in this, they will ſoon be ſatisfied, that it is impoſſible for them to defend their own faith, without, at the ſame time, admitting what will be ſufficient to vindicate ours alſo. Both the ſyſtems are, in effect, but one, and muſt ſtand or fall together.

It is alſo earneſtly to be wiſhed that the attention of *chriſtians*, as well as that of Jews, might be drawn to this ſubject; that having a clearer idea of the *certainty*, as

well as of the *value* of their faith, they might both be able to defend it, whenever they hear it attacked, and alſo prize it the more, and be more careful to govern their lives by it. Without this, men are but *nominal chriſtians*, which is in reality much worſe than being no chriſtians at all. Better would it be for any man never to have heard the name of Chriſt, than be his diſciple *in name only*.

To be chriſtians to any purpoſe, we ſhould always keep in view the great practical principles of our religion. It ought not to be in the power of buſineſs, or of pleaſure, to make us loſe ſight of them. Chriſtianity will be no obſtruction to any thing that is truly rational, and becoming a man, with reſpect to either; and whatever is not rational, ought to be abandoned on principles that are even not chriſtian.

It is becauſe I conſider the principles of chriſtianity as properly *practical* ones, that I am leſs ſolicitous about the converſion of any unbelievers

unbelievers who are much advanced in life, at leaſt for their own ſakes; ſince their diſpoſitions and habits are already formed, ſo that it can hardly be ſuppoſed to be in the power of new and better principles to change them. But I wiſh it for the ſake of *younger perſons*, on whom their opinions have influence, and on whom good principles might have the greateſt effect.

To unbelievers of a certain age, a conviction of the truth of chriſtianity would only be the acquiſition of a new ſpeculative truth, the magnitude and value of which would never be fully felt, or make much impreſſion on them. Having heard it from their infancy, having in general believed it for ſome time, and not coming to diſbelieve it, till they had long diſregarded it, it will not have the effect of *abſolute novelty*, as it had with the heathen world at the time of the promulgation of chriſtianity, when it produced a wonderful change in the lives and manners of perſons of all ages. With

reſpect

reſpect to thoſe unbelievers of the preſent times, who are hackneyed in the ways of the world, their minds are already ſo occupied, that they would give but little attention to the principles of chriſtianity, if they ſhould come to believe in it.

But be the advantage more or leſs to ſuch unbelievers themſelves, from their converſion to chriſtianity, there are others to whom it might be the greateſt benefit. We ſee every day, how men of reputed ſenſe, and general knowledge, are looked up to by thoſe who are young, and entering upon the buſy ſcenes of life, and whoſe minds are not yet ſo much occupied, but that they might feel the full force of new truth. If they only perceive a perſon of acknowledged ability, and general good character, to ſmile when the ſubject of religion, or chriſtianity, is mentioned, they will ſuſpect, perhaps conclude at once, that there is nothing in it that deſerves their attention; and having this perſuaſion, however haſtily formed, they may go without

without reſtraint into that career of vicious indulgence, to which their age prompts, and which they know chriſtianity forbids.

Whereas, were all perſons of reſpectable characters, on other accounts, believers in chriſtianity, though they might not have much zeal for it, they would at leaſt behave and ſpeak in ſuch a manner, when the ſubject was mentioned, as would lead young perſons to conſider it as a ſerious buſineſs, and not to be trifled with; and this might lead to the moſt deſirable conſequences, What young perſons embrace, they embrace with ardour; and their minds are not ſo much engroſſed with the things of this world, but that they might attend to thoſe of another; and notwithſtanding the impetuoſity of paſſion, there is in uncontaminated youth an ingenuous modeſty, a ſenſe of honour, and a dread of vice, almoſt peculiar to that early period of life; which aided by good principles, may be more than equal to the reſtraint of their paſſions, and render them

them capable, as we frequently ſee them to be, of the moſt heroic acts of virtue.

But the greateſt advantage that I look to is that, when the parents are chriſtians, their children will be in the way of receiving a religious and chriſtian education; in conſequence of which, they will be brought acquainted with the ſcriptures, from their earlieſt years; and without this, it is hardly poſſible that they ſhould ever acquire a true reliſh for them. The phraſeology of the the ſcriptures, notwithſtanding the noble ſimplicity, and true ſublimity, of many parts of them, is (at leaſt according to our preſent tranſlation) ſo uncouth to an European ear, and both the cuſtoms, and the popular opinions of the oriental nations, which were adopted by the pious Jews, as well as others, appear ſo ſtrange, that perſons whoſe taſte has been formed by the modes of modern education, will often be more ſtruck with ſuch circumſtances as will tend to make them ſmile, than with thoſe that ought to make them ſerious. This will

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more eſpecially be the caſe with thoſe whoſe minds have got a tinge from reading the prophane jeſts of ſuch writers as Voltaire. There are many perſons whoſe minds are in ſuch a ſtate, that it is not even in their own power to make the allowance that they ought to do, and which they are even ſenſible they ought to do, for the circumſtances above mentioned, ſo as to read the ſcriptures with the ſame ſatisfaction and advantage, that one who has been educated a chriſtian, and been brought up with a reverence for thoſe ſacred books habitually does. Our feelings are far from ſo readily following our opinions.

Not that I conſider the books of ſcripture as *inſpired*, and on that account entitled to this high degree of reſpect, but as authentic records of the diſpenſations of God to mankind, with every particular of which we cannot be too well acquainted. The ſacred writers, as we juſtly call them, were moreover, in general, perſons of ſuch exalted piety, and diſintereſted benevolence

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(the moſt genuine and affecting marks of which abound in their writings) and the hiſtories themſelves are ſo valuable and improving, that no other reading can ſupply the place of this. It is in vain that we look in profane hiſtory, for a narrative ſo inſtructive, for characters ſo excellent, or forms of devotions ſo pure. What is there in all the remains of heathen antiquity, comparable to the book of Pſalms? There never exiſted among the Greeks or Romans that knowledge of one God, the maker and preſerver of all things, and that perſuaſion concerning his univerſal and righteous government, which alone can inſpire ſuch ſentiments, and dictate ſuch compoſitions.

My principal object in this work will eaſily be perceived to have been, to give a juſt view of the circumſtances in which chriſtianity was promulgated; ſince, from the conſideration of theſe alone, can it be demonſtrated that the origin of it was divine; and in deſcribing thoſe I have been much aſſiſted by *Dr. Lardner's Jewiſh and*

Heathen Teſtimonies, a work of ſingular value, and which, in my opinion, no unbeliever, who has heard of it, can hold himſelf excuſable in rejecting chriſtianity, till he has read and conſidered. From this work only have I given the view of ancient objections to chriſtianity, in the 14th and 15th Letters. I have lately had occaſion to peruſe the authors from which he has collected them; but I know of nothing of much importance that can be added to what he has produced; and I thought it of ſome uſe and conſequence to bring into one view, what is diſperſed through four quarto volumes. I have choſen his tranſlations, in preference to any that I might have given of my own, as no perſon will queſtion his fidelity, his diligence, or his univerſal impartiality.

Great benefit would accrue to chriſtianity, if it be founded in truth (and on no other ſuppoſition would I wiſh to have any reſpect for it at all) from a calm and free diſcuſſion of its evidences with an intelligent

gent unbeliever. This I endeavoured to procure, when I animadverted upon *Mr. Gibbon's two chapters* in the concluſion to my *Hiſtory of the Corruptions of Chriſtianity*. But with the invitation I then gave Mr. Gibbon, he has hitherto refuſed to comply. What may be inferred from his declining this diſcuſſion, it is for the public to judge; and it concerns himſelf, and not me. A copy of theſe *Letters* will alſo be ſent to him, and if he (or any other unbeliever of ability and character) chuſe to anſwer them, he may depend upon hearing from me in reply. And, in my opinion, and that of many others, no public controverſy could be more uſeful, or more ſeaſonable.

In this caſe it will be neceſſary for Mr. Gibbon, if *he* ſhould undertake the diſcuſſion, to lay aſide the maſk he has affected to wear, by pretending to believe in chriſtianity, when he evidently does not; but it is a maſk by which he conceals nothing. If I treat any thing in the religion of my coun-

try

try as abſurd, I do it openly, and gravely; and at the ſame time I hold myſelf ready to defend whatever I advance, or to retract what I may be unable to defend.

If Mr. Gibbon believes chriſtianity to be *miſchievous*, as well as *falſe*, let him, as becomes an honeſt man, and a good citizen, openly diſclaim, and openly oppugn it. If he thinks it to be falſe, but *uſeful*, let him neither write nor ſpeak on the ſubject. Nothing can juſtify this, but a perſuaſion of its being better for the world that the ſcheme ſhould be exploded and abandoned.

If any man, embarked in a voyage with others, perceives that the veſſel in which they ſail will certainly be loſt, and that it is not in his power, or in theirs, to prevent it, he ought to keep his knowledge to himſelf, and not give others needleſs alarm and diſtreſs. If he think that, by proper exertion, there is a poſſibility of ſaving the ſhip, he ought to give the greateſt and quickeſt alarm that he can. But in

no caſe can he be juſtified in giving his opinion in ſuch a manner, as that ſome of the paſſengers might underſtand him to mean one thing, and others another; and in amuſing himſelf with laughing at the miſtakes that were made about his real ſentiments. Such, however, has been the conduct of Mr. Gibbon, with reſpect to a ſubject of infinitely more moment than the danger of a ſhipwreck.

If Mr. Gibbon be, as he pretends, a believer in chriſtianity, and a future life, let him write on the ſubject in ſuch a manner, as that no perſon ſhall entertain a doubt of it; and ſo that their faith may be ſtrengthened, and not weakened by his writings. If he be an unbeliever, let him no longer trifle with the world, and uſe the language of deceit, without deceiving.

By replying to Mr. Gibbon, in theſe *Letters*, I am far from meaning to inſinuate, that I think lightly of what others have done in the ſame controverſy. On the

contrary, every anſwer to him that I have yet ſeen, contains a ſufficient refutation of every thing of any conſequence that he has advanced againſt chriſtianity *, and the defence that he has made of *himſelf* againſt Mr. Davis, is far from amounting to a defence of the *cauſe* that he has eſpouſed, which is all that the public is concerned with. The reply of the learned Biſhop of Llandaff is particularly valuable; but I am ſorry to ſee him affect to believe Mr. Gibbon to be ſincere in the regard that he profeſſes for chriſtianity. This I think to be unworthy of a chriſtian biſhop; as I think Mr. Gibbon's pretences are unworthy of a man. I treat Mr. Gibbon as unqueſtion-

* I ſhall take this opportunity of acquainting my reader with the ſatisfaction I have juſt received from an Eſſay in *Mr. Cumberland's Obſerver*, Vol. I. No. 113, in anſwer to what Mr. Gibbon has ſaid concerning the darkneſs at our Saviour's crucifixion. His remarks appear to me to be very judicious, and well expreſſed. I have ſome doubts, however, whether that darkneſs was preternatural, as well as whether it was very conſiderable.

ably an unbeliever, and in that character I wiſh him to make his defence.

Since this Preface was ſent to the preſs, I have ſeen *Dr. Toulmin's Eſſay on the Eternity of the World.* But after what I have ſaid in reply to Mr. Hammon, I ſee no reaſon to take particular notice of it.

He is far from denying *deſign*, or a principle of *intelligence*, in the univerſe, and ſincerely wiſhes, p. 130, "to confirm mankind in the belief of the exiſtence of "what is *great*, *powerful*, and *good*."

"So far," ſays he, p. 133, "are the arguments which I have made uſe of from "having the ſmalleſt tendency to damp the "expectations of future being and felicity, "that they open the moſt brilliant proſpects to the imagination; they enforce the "excel-

"excellence of moral rectitude, and the "exiſtence of infinite wiſdom and intelli- "gence, inſeparable from, and pervading, "an eternal univerſe."

He aſſerts the eternity of the human race. But, in my opinion, only proves a ſtate of the earth anterior to the period of the Moſaic account of the creation, which I believe is the general opinion of philoſophical chriſtians. He deſcants on the pretenſions to high antiquity by the Hindoos, as thoſe which he thinks to be the beſt founded, but he ſays nothing of the writings of Moſes, who was ſo near to the origin of the preſent race of man, as (independent of other conſiderations, not noticed by Dr. Toulmin) makes it highly probable that his account is very near the truth. But the belief of revelation does not abſolutely require a belief of any events prior to the age of Moſes, or ſuch as himſelf and his cotemporaries could not but have had the means of being well informed of.

ERRATA.

N. B. (*b*) signifies *from the bottom of the page.*

Page 9. l. 4. (*b*) for *would*, read *could.*

—— 16. l. 1. Note, for *contracted*, read *contradicted.*

—— 72. l. 1. (*b*) for *they*, read *it.*

—— 100. l. 5. (*b*) for *transformation*, read *transformations.*

—— 172. l. 1. for *has been referred to before*, read *will be mentioned hereafter.*

—— 184. l. 9. for *proceeding*, read *preceding.*

—— 227. l. 6. for *doctrine*, read *doctrines.*

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LETTERS

TO A

PHILOSOPHICAL UNBELIEVER.

PART II.

LETTER I.

Of the Nature of Teſtimony.

DEAR SIR,

I Am happy to find that, in my former *Letters*, I have been able to ſuggeſt to you ſuch conſiderations as, by the help of your own juſt reflections, have removed the difficulties that lay in your way with reſpect to the belief of the being of a God, and of his moral government of

the world. But you think that the arguments from the light of nature, in favour of a *future life*, amount to little more than to ſhew that the thing is *not impoſſible*, not being, upon the whole, repugnant to the obſerved courſe of nature; and that the ſtriking *fact* of our ſeeing men die juſt like brutes, or plants, without any ſymptom of revival, wears ſo different an aſpect, that you cannot think we are ſufficiently authorized to indulge ſo much as what may be called the *hope* of a reſurrection. For as to the opinion of an *immaterial ſoul*, diſtinct from the body, which makes its eſcape at death, we are both agreed, that no appearance in nature favours the ſuppoſition. Whatever the powers of *perception* and *thought* be in themſelves, they evidently depend upon the organization of the brain; and therefore, according to all the received rules of philoſophizing, muſt be aſcribed to it, ſo that they cannot ſubſiſt without it.

Acknowledging, however, as you do, that a future life, and an endleſs continuance of being (in which we ſhall make continual

advances

advances in knowledge and virtue, enlarging our comprehenſion of mind without limits) affords a flattering proſpect; and as this is ſtrongly, and with the greateſt confidence, held out to us in the chriſtian, if not in the Jewiſh, revelation, in which you know I am a believer, you wiſh that I would explain to you, as diſtinctly as I can, and from the firſt principles of *aſſent*, the proper ground of this faith in revealed religion, in the ſame manner, as, in my former correſpondence, I explained the principles of natural religion. In other words, you wiſh me to inform you, on what foundation it is, that I believe that the Maker of the world, and of man, has at any time revealed his will to any part of the human race, ſo as to promiſe eternal life and happineſs to thoſe who obey it.

Encouraged by the ſucceſs of my former attempt, I am very ready, on this, as on that occaſion, to give you all the ſatisfaction in my power; and I earneſtly wiſh that it may be with the ſame effect; as I am confident that, diſpoſed as you are to the prac-

tice of virtue, a belief in revelation will make you a ſtill better and much happier man, even in this life. You will look with unſpeakably more pleaſure on every thing around you, and quit this ſcene of things, not only without regret, but with a ſatisfaction far exceeding that which you have ever had in it.

I ſhall begin with obſerving, that the evidence of revelation is neceſſarily of the *hiſtorical* kind, and reſts upon *teſtimony*: and though I hardly need to explain the foundation of our faith in teſtimony, I ſhall, by way of introduction to the diſquiſition I am undertaking, obſerve, that, philoſophically conſidered, it ariſes from our *experience* that it may be depended upon; it having been found that there is generally a correſpondence between what is aſſerted by men, and the things, or events, which their aſſertions reſpect. Thus, if one perſon tells me that another ſaid, or did, ſo or ſo, and I find by any other evidence (for inſtance that of my own ſenſes) that he actually *did* ſay, or do, what I was informed of, I am ſatisfied

fied that the aſſertion I heard was true. If I find by repeated experience, that the ſame perſon never does deceive me, I conclude that there muſt be a ſufficient *cauſe* for this *conſtant appearance*, and that, in the ſame circumſtances, the ſame effect may be depended upon. In common language, I ſay that my informer is a *man of veracity*, and that he will not deceive me. In the ſame manner, if, notwithſtanding a number of impoſitions, I find that among mankind at large, a regard to truth greatly prevails over falſehood, I conclude that there is in general ſufficient ground for *faith in teſtimony*.

Examining this intereſting appearance more cloſely, I find in what caſes teſtimony is moſt apt to be fallacious, as thoſe in which men either have not ſufficient opportunity of being well informed themſelves, or thoſe in which they have an intereſt in deceiving others; and ſeparating theſe from other caſes of human teſtimony, I find a ſtill ſtronger ground of aſſent in the remaining caſes.

It is true, that *ſingle perſons* may be ſo circumſtanced, as that though to appearance, they may have had ſufficient opportunity of being well informed themſelves, and we can diſcover in them no deſign to impoſe upon others, yet, through ſome unknown cauſe, their teſtimony may be defective on one or both of theſe accounts. But when we have the concurrent teſtimony of *different perſons*, unconnected with each other, equally competent judges of what they relate, and to appearance equally impartial, that defect in the evidence is removed; it being to the laſt degree improbable that the ſame, or different unknown influences ſhould affect many different perſons, no way connected with each other. Accordingly, in many caſes, we do not entertain the leaſt ſenſible doubt of the truth of teſtimony, as that there exiſts ſuch a city as Rome, or that Alexander conquered Darius. Our faith in a mathematical truth cannot be perceived to be ſtronger than our faith in ſuch hiſtorical propoſitions as theſe.

I am, Dear Sir, yours, &c.

J. PRIESTLEY.

LETTER II.

Of the Evidence of Revelation.

DEAR SIR,

AS human teſtimony is a ſufficient ground of faith, it is applicable to every thing of which men can be ſaid to be *witneſſes*, that is, of whatever comes under the cognizance of their ſenſes, as ſeeing, hearing, &c. and there is no fact ſo extraordinary, or unexpected, but may ſafely be admitted on this ground; there being no limit in this caſe, but that of abſolute *impoſſiblity*.

Now, it cannot be denied but that it is in the power of God, the maker of the world, to ſignify his will to men, in the manner deſcribed in the hiſtory of the Jewiſh and chriſtian revelations, to perform all that is there advanced as a proof of his interpoſition in the caſe, and likewiſe to fulfil every thing that is there promiſed; the moſt important article of which, is the raiſing of all

mankind from the dead, and enduing them with a power of immortal life. Becauſe there is nothing in all this that implies a greater degree of power than muſt have been exerted in the creation of ſuch a ſyſtem as this of which we are a part. Whatever power it was that *eſtabliſhed*, the ſame, no doubt, can *change*, the laws of nature, or ſuſpend the operation of them; and I muſt now take it for granted, that there is a *cauſe*, or *author* of nature, and that this is a *deſigning* cauſe.

Whether this Being eſtabliſhed the preſent order of nature from eternity, ſo that it be coeval with himſelf, or this part of the ſyſtem had a beginning, from an exertion of power independent of any thing that preceded it, it muſt be in itſelf *poſſible*, that the ſame Being may exert a ſimilar power whenever he pleaſes. There is no conceivable difference between this caſe and that of a man capable of erecting any particular engine, and retaining the power of ſtopping the motion of the engine, or altering the conſtruction of it. All that can be

be ſaid is, that no *motive* could exiſt, which ſhould induce the author of nature to interpoſe in this manner. But who can be authorized to ſay that the Divine Being, the author of nature, muſt neceſſarily leave the preſent ſyſtem to the operation of the preſent laws of it, and that there could never be any *propriety*, or *uſe*, in ſuſpending them? It muſt be extreme arrogance in any man to pronounce in this manner concerning his maker.

Some interruption of the courſe of nature is the only proper evidence of the interpoſition of the author of nature, and every other kind of evidence muſt neceſſarily be equivocal. Now there is an account of a great variety of ſuch interpoſitions in the hiſtorical books of ſcripture, facts, of which great numbers of perſons, in ſome caſes, whole nations (by no means in circumſtances in which it can be ſuppoſed that they would be deceived themſelves, or be willing to deceive others) were witneſſes. Theſe interpoſitions were not confined to one age of the world, but diſtinguiſhed ſeveral

veral ages, to the time of Chriſt and the apoſtles.

The reality, however, of theſe events, is that which muſt be called in queſtion by thoſe who do not believe in the Jewiſh or chriſtian revelations. They muſt ſuppoſe, that the evidence alleged for the miraculous interpoſitions on the truth of which theſe revelations reſt is, in ſome reſpect or other, *inſufficient*; and what a philoſophical believer replies to them is, that there is a *law* reſpecting the validity of human teſtimony, as well as other things; and that this particular teſtimony is ſo circumſtanced, as that it will be more extraordinary, if it be not true, than if the things related ſhould have happened. For ſuch *teſtimony* is itſelf to be conſidered as a *fact*, or *appearance*, which requires to be accounted for, as much as any other fact whatever. The moſt idle report cannot be raiſed without a *cauſe*. The unbeliever, therefore, ſhould conſider how he can account for the *exiſtence* of the Jewiſh and chriſtian religions, and the *hiſtory of them*,

as themſelves *indiſputable facts*. The cauſe of theſe facts, the believer ſays, is clearly found in the hiſtories of thoſe religions; and he challenges the unbeliever to account for the facts on any other principle. Such I apprehend to be the true and philoſophical ſtate of the queſtion which you wiſh me to diſcuſs.

The generality even of chriſtians have been too apt to conſider *chriſtian faith* as ſomething of a different nature from that which relates to other things, and unbelievers have, as might have been expected, taken their advantage of this circumſtance. But the philoſophical chriſtian forms his judgment concerning all ſimilar propoſitions on ſimilar principles, and makes no exception with reſpect to matters of religion. Thus, in all abſtract propoſitions, that may be reduced to *number*, or *quantity*, the evidence of truth is the coincidence of ideas belonging to the ſubject and predicate of any propoſition. If, for example, three things, as three plants, three animals, or three men, cannot be one thing, one plant, one

one animal, or one man; neither can three Divine Beings, or perſons (for in this caſe they muſt be the ſame thing) be only one God.

With reſpect to *hypotheſes*, to explain appearances of any kind, the philoſophical chriſtian conſiders himſelf as bound to admit that which, according to the received rules of philoſophizing, or reaſoning, is the moſt probable; ſo that the queſtion between him and other philoſophers is, whether his hypotheſis or theirs will beſt explain the *known facts*, ſuch as are the preſent belief of Judaiſm and chriſtianity, and alſo the belief of them in the earlieſt ages to which they can be traced.

The unbeliever muſt ſay that theſe facts, and all that we certainly know to have been fact, may be admitted, without ſuppoſing that Moſes, or Chriſt, had any divine miſſion, or were authorized by God to teach any doctrine at all; and, conſequently, that no miracles were ever wrought in proof of their miſſion. Whereas, the philoſophical chriſtian ſays, that ſuch facts as all perſons

in the leaſt acquainted with hiſtory *muſt* admit, neceſſarily lead us to conclude, that Moſes and the ſubſequent prophets, and alſo that Chriſt and the apoſtles, had a divine miſſion, and that miracles muſt have been wrought in atteſtation of them.

The philoſophical chriſtian farther ſays, that the ſtate of things could never have been what it is univerſally acknowledged to *be*, and *to have been*, without miracles; and that the miracles which the unbeliever muſt have recourſe to, beſides anſwering no conceivable good purpoſe, muſt have been infinitely more numerous, and of a more extraordinary nature, than any that *he* has occaſion to admit. For he maintains that, if the men who lived in the time of Moſes, and alſo thoſe who lived in the time of Chriſt and the apoſtles, were conſtituted as men *now* are (which muſt be taken for granted) they could not have believed the miracles recorded in the books of Moſes, and in the New Teſtament, without either ſuch ſufficient evidence of their reality, as the writers of theſe books relate that they had

had (which he thinks moſt probable) or without a ſupernatural influence on their minds, diſpoſing them to receive as true what was at the ſame time totally deſtitute of ſuch evidence, and likewiſe manifeſtly contrary to their intereſt, and wiſhes to receive; ſo that great numbers of men muſt have been what we commonly call *infatuated*, or partially *deprived of their ſenſes*, a thing which no perſon, who conſiders the circumſtances of the caſe, can poſſibly admit.

They muſt alſo have been thus miraculouſly infatuated for the ſake of building upon their belief of a ſeries of events which had never happened, a ſyſtem of religion, which of courſe could not be true, and therefore with a view to lead a great part of mankind to this time, and probably to the end of all time, into a great miſtake, and a miſtake which they had no means of ever rectifying.

Now it can never be imagined that any miracles, and particularly ſo many, and of ſo extraordinary a kind, as this ſcheme requires

quires, ſhould have been wrought for ſuch a purpoſe as this. And yet, the philoſophical chriſtian maintains, that there is, in reality, no alternative between admitting ſuch miracles as theſe, and for ſuch a purpoſe as this, and the truth of thoſe recorded in the books of Moſes, the goſpels, and the book of Acts, the credibility of which, he ſubmits to the moſt rigorous examination.

All that is neceſſary, therefore, to the proper diſcuſſion of the evidence of the divine miſſion of Moſes, or of Chriſt, among philoſophers, is to attend carefully to the circumſtances which accompanied the promulgation of their reſpective religions, to conſider the perſons by whom they were received, and the influences to which they were expoſed. And it appears to me, that this due attention has never yet been given to theſe circumſtances by any unbelievers.

I am, Sir,

Yours, &c.

LETTER

LETTER III.

Of the Antecedent Probability of divine Revelation.

DEAR SIR,

TO the ſtate of the queſtion in the preceding letter, an unbeliever will perhaps ſay, that the idea of divine interpoſition is ſo very extraordinary, from nothing of the kind having been known in our own times, that no evidence can authorize us to admit it; it being more eaſy to ſuppoſe that any teſtimony, however circumſtanced, may be falſe, than that ſuch accounts ſhould be true.

But, beſides obſerving that no experience of one age can be any contradiction to that of another * (and all hiſtory ſhews that there are a variety of events peculiar to certain

* The objection to miracles as contracted by preſent experience, is particularly conſidered in my *Inſtitutes of Natural and Revealed Religion*, vol. i. p. 262.

periods;

periods; so that it by no means follows, that because we see no miracles in the present age, there never were any formerly) I shall, in this letter, endeavour to shew that, when the proper use of miracles, and the great object of revelation, are considered, it will not be at all incredible, or improbable, that there may have been divine interpositions in former ages, though now they are not necessary, and therefore not to be expected.

Admitting the author of nature to have had the kindest, and greatest design respecting man, the rational part of his creation here (which, considering that God has been proved to be a benevolent Being, is certainly far from being improbable) viz. to lead him to the true knowledge of himself, of his duty here, and of his expectations hereafter, to lead him to cultivate proper affections respecting his Maker, and his fellow-creatures; thereby to exalt his nature, and train him for a higher sphere of existence hereafter; and admitting the nature of man always to have been what we now observe it to be, let us consider what method is best

adapted to gain the end above-mentioned. With theſe views, would it be the wiſeſt method to leave mankind to collect the knowledge requiſite for this high moral improvement from their own obſervations on the courſe of nature, or to aſſiſt them by extraordinary communications, or interpoſitions? That the latter, and not the former method, would be more *effectual*, and therefore preferable, may, I think, be concluded from the following conſiderations.

1. The knowledge neceſſary for this great object, viz. that of the being and unity of God, the extent of his providence and moral government, even that of ſeveral moral duties, the beneficial tendency of which is not apparent, and eſpecially that of a future life (the demonſtration of which ſeems, indeed, to be impoſſible from any appearances in nature) could never have been diſcovered by man.

It is true that, ſome part of the human race have been deſtitute of this knowledge, and will probably remain ſo for many ages. But they were once in poſſeſſion of it, though they

they have now loſt it, and by ſubſequent revelations, things are put into ſuch a train, as that, in due time, without any farther interpoſition, they muſt again come to the knowledge of all the uſeful truths above recited. It is alſo agreeable to the courſe of nature, that great things have ſmall beginnings, and great excellence is always the produce of long time.

2. If it had been poſſible for men to have diſcovered the above-mentioned ſalutary truths by the light of nature, yet their attention might never have been drawn to any thing of the kind, without ſome direction. The bulk of mankind, at leaſt, are not apt to attend to the cauſes of any uniform conſtant appearances, ſuch as the riſing and ſetting of the ſun, the annual returns of ſummer and winter, ſeed-time and harveſt, &c. They are only the more thoughtful and inquiſitive, that endeavour to trace the cauſes of ſuch phenomena as theſe. Whereas, if the ſun ſhould not riſe, or ſhould riſe an hour later than uſual, the attention of all mankind would be immediately excited;

and from inquiring into the cauſe of a thing ſo *unuſual*, they might be led to reflect upon the cauſe of what was *uſual* and *regular*.

If it was of importance, therefore, that the attention of mankind ſhould be drawn to the *author of nature*, and that they ſhould pay him any *homage*, there is not (as far as we can judge from our obſervation of human nature) any method ſo well calculated to produce the effect, as the exhibition of what we call *miracles*, or an interruption of the uſual courſe of nature. So far, therefore, are miracles, which have ſo great an object, from being in themſelves incredible, that we might even have expected them, on the idea of the author of nature giving conſtant attention to the works of his hands, and being willing to engage the attention of his rational offſpring to himſelf, as the means of exalting their natures, and fitting them for their proper happineſs.

How many are there, even of philoſophers, who ſpend their lives in the inveſtigation of the laws of nature, without ever

raiſing their thoughts to the author of nature, and even maintaining that there is no proper, that is, no intelligent author of nature at all? If this be the caſe in the preſent highly enlightened age, what could we expect from an age deſtitute of all inſtruction? In theſe circumſtances, it appears highly probable to me, that the idea of an intelligent author of nature, at leaſt of there being only *one*, infinitely great, wiſe, and good author, would never have occurred to them at all.

Here then is a *nodus deo vindice dignus*, a great end to be obtained, and no ſufficient *natural means* to attain it. Conſequently, *miracles*, having ſo important an uſe, are neither impoſſible, nor improbable; and therefore, the evidence of them is by no means to be rejected without ſerious examination. Very circumſtantial evidence is, no doubt, requiſite to eſtabliſh their credibility, as that of any *unuſual facts*, not analogous to any that we have obſerved. But human teſtimony, that of perſons who have

the perfect uſe of their ſenſes, and under no prejudice, is abundantly competent to it.

The king of Siam, according to the ſtory, had never ſeen water in any other form than that of a *fluid*, and therefore, could have no idea, from his own experience, of the poſſibility of ſuch a thing as *ice*; but, notwithſtanding this, he might think it more probable that it ſhould even become ſo hard as to bear men and carriages, than that the Dutchmen, who told him that it was actually ſometimes ſo, in their country, ſhould deceive him. In like manner, though no perſon now living has ſeen a river divide, and men walking acroſs its channel, or any perſon come to life again, after he had been unqueſtionably dead, yet, the teſtimony of paſt ages, to events of this kind, may be ſo circumſtanced, as that it ſhall be naturally more probable that theſe things ſhould have *then* taken place, than that the men of thoſe ages ſhould have combined to deceive both their cotemporaries, and all

poſterity, by their relation of them; and in this caſe only, do I ſay that we ought to admit them.

I am, Sir,

Yours, &c.

LETTER IV.

Of the Nature of Prejudice for, *or* againſt, *Revelation.*

DEAR SIR,

BEFORE I proceed any farther in this correſpondence, you wiſh me to account for what appears to you to be a remarkable fact, viz. the great prevalence of infidelity among perſons of a philoſophical turn of mind. There muſt, as you juſtly obſerve, be a *cauſe* of this, as well as of every other *fact*, and though the hiſtory of revelation be true, there muſt be ſome adequate cauſe of

its not always having been ſeen, or acknowledged to be ſo.

As I, who am myſelf, a believer in revelation, cannot think that the cauſe of infidelity in any perſon, is a want of ſufficient evidence of its truth, I muſt account for it, by ſuppoſing that there is in all unbelievers, a ſtate of mind which pre-diſpoſes them either to give too little attention to the evidence of it, or to ſee that evidence, or the doctrines of revelation, in ſome unfavourable point of light: and in moſt, I think, it is owing to a want of attention to the ſubject, and this appears to ariſe very often from a ſecret wiſh that chriſtianity may not be true.

To be abſolutely indifferent to the ſubject of religion, and the doctrine of a future life, is hardly poſſible. A bad man cannot wiſh chriſtianity to be true, as a good man, eſpecially one who has made conſiderable ſacrifices to his integrity, cannot help wiſhing that it may be ſo. The ſuſpicion only of its being well-founded muſt fill the mind of the former with painful apprehenſions, and that of the latter with the moſt pleaſing of

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all proſpects. It might ſeem, therefore, that a good man is as likely to be biaſſed in favour of the evidences of revelation, as the bad man is to be againſt them; did there not appear to be a conſiderable difference in ſome circumſtances of the two caſes.

A man has no motive to enquire into the foundation of his fears, unleſs he be previouſly determined to do every thing in his power to avoid the impending evil. Becauſe if he be previouſly determined to purſue a certain courſe *at all events*, he will think himſelf a gainer by troubling himſelf as little as poſſible about the riſque that he runs in purſuing it; and this I apprehend to be the caſe with very many unbelievers. They are men of pleaſure, or of ambition, to a conſiderable degree, though they may diſtinguiſh themſelves by various liberal purſuits. Their habits and plans of life are fixed, and not being diſpoſed to change them, they are diſinclined to any *inquiry*, the iſſue of which might be a conviction of the importance of changing them. They are conſcious to themſelves that they have

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no reaſon to wiſh chriſtianity to be true, and therefore, they think as little about it as poſſible.

On the other hand, the influence of the world around us is ſuch, as that no man can have perfect confidence in his virtue and integrity. He may *hope* that a future life will be to his advantage, but this will not be ſuch as to indiſpoſe him to enquire into the evidences of it.

Beſides, every truly good man makes many ſacrifices to his integrity, and therefore, cannot but wiſh to know on what grounds he does this. A chriſtian refrains from many gratifications, for indulging in which, the world in general would not greatly blame, but rather applaud him. He has, therefore, ſufficient motives to enquire whether he does not ſubmit to theſe inconveniences without reaſon, and whether he has ſufficient ground to expect an equivalent for his preſent ſufferings, which, in time of perſecution, may be very great.

It is ſaid of the apoſtles, after the reſurrection of our Saviour, that when they firſt heard

heard of it, *they did not believe through joy*. The event was so far beyond their expectations, that they hesitated a long time before they could really believe it, and did not do it at last without the most satisfactory evidence. In the same manner will many virtuous and pious persons be affected with respect to the truth of that religion which promises them the glorious reward of a resurrection to immortal life and happiness, a thing of which they could not have any assurance from the light of nature.

Whether I have satisfactorily accounted for it or not, it is, I apprehend, indisputably true, that the generality of unbelievers are averse to enquire into the evidence of revelation. Few have taken the trouble even to read the scriptures, which contain the history of it, though they would have read, with the greatest eagerness, any other writings of equal antiquity, and as remarkable for the peculiarities of their style and composition, &c. This can only arise from such a dislike of christianity, as (whether they be distinctly aware of it or not) will necessarily

neceſſarily lay an undue bias upon their minds againſt it.

On the other hand, believers in chriſtianity not only take a ſingular pleaſure in reading the ſcriptures, and every thing in favour of the evidence of it, but thoſe of them who have a turn for reading and ſpeculation, peruſe with the greateſt care whatever is written againſt chriſtianity; a proof that their wiſh to find chriſtianity true does not operate ſo unfavourably to freedom of enquiry with them, as a wiſh that it may *not* be true does with unbelievers.

Theſe facts, I preſume, will not be controverted. My own acquaintance with unbelievers is pretty extenſive, and I know very few of them, though men of letters (for others are out of the queſtion on both ſides) who have read any thing in favour of chriſtianity, and moſt of them know little or nothing of the ſcriptures.

If there be any truth in theſe obſervations, the rejection, or rather the non-reception of chriſtianity, by ever ſo many men of ſenſe, who have not taken the trou-

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ble to enquire into the evidence of it, cannot be allowed to have much weight. It may be founded in truth, though they who made no ſearch into it have not found it out.

I am, &c.

LETTER V.

Of the Cauſes of Infidelity in Perſons of a ſpeculative Turn of Mind.

DEAR SIR,

THERE is no claſs or deſcription of men but what is ſubject to peculiar prejudices; and every *prejudice* muſt operate as an obſtacle to the reception of ſome truth. It is in vain for unbelievers to pretend to be free from prejudice. They may, indeed, be free from thoſe of the vulgar, but they have others peculiar to themſelves; and the very affectation of being free from vulgar prejudice, and of being wiſer than

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the reſt of mankind, muſt indiſpoſe them to the admiſſion even of truth, if it ſhould happen to be with the common people.

The ſuſpicion that the faith of the vulgar is ſuperſtitious and falſe is, no doubt, often well founded; becauſe they, of courſe, maintain the *oldeſt opinions*, while the ſpeculative part of mankind are making new diſcoveries in ſcience. Yet we often find that they who pride themſelves on their being the fartheſt removed from ſuperſtition in ſome things, are the greateſt dupes to it in others, and it is not univerſally true, that all old opinions are falſe, and all new ones well founded. An averſion to the creed of the vulgar may therefore miſlead a man, and from a fondneſs for ſingularity, he may be ſingularly in the wrong.

Beſides, the creed of the vulgar of the preſent day is to be conſidered not ſo much as *their* creed, for they were not the inventors of it, as that of the thinking and inquiſitive in ſome former period. For thoſe whom we diſtinguiſh by the appellation of *the vulgar*, are not thoſe who introduce

duce any new opinions, but who receive them from others, of whoſe judgment they have been led to think highly. And where *ſcience* is not concerned, but merely *hiſtorical events*, an old opinion is certainly not improbable on account of its being old; and all that chriſtianity reſts upon is the reality of certain hiſtorical events.

They who are now chriſtians without enquiry, received their faith from thoſe who did enquire, who diſtinguiſhed themſelves from the vulgar of their day by the novelty and ſingularity of their opinions, and who had the courage to defy danger and death in the cauſe of what they apprehended to be new and important truths. Unbelievers of the preſent age, therefore, ought not to conſider chriſtianity as the belief of the vulgar of this period, but enquire whether their faith, as held by thoſe who firſt embraced and propagated it, be well founded.

But if we exclude all conſideration of the illiterate, and confine our views to men of letters, it may be expected, from the very great

great numbers of unbelievers in the preſent age, that this ſource of prejudice againſt chriſtianity muſt diminiſh. Among thoſe who are called *philoſophers*, the unbelievers are *the crowd*, and the believers are thoſe who have the courage to diſſent from them. If we take into our view men of rank and fortune, as well as men of letters, it muſt be acknowledged that there are among unbelievers great numbers from whoſe underſtanding and knowledge, in other reſpects, the cauſe of infidelity can derive but little honour. From theſe circumſtances I begin to flatter myſelf, that the evidences of chriſtianity will meet with a more impartial examination at this day than they have done in the courſe of the laſt fifty years.

Another great cauſe of infidelity with philoſophical and ſpeculative people is likewiſe happily ceaſing, and in time it muſt be entirely removed; and for this we are, in a great meaſure, indebted to unbelievers themſelves. I mean the many corruptions and abuſes, which, in a courſe of time, have been introduced into chriſtianity from foreign

reign ſources, and eſpecially from the philoſophy of the times in which it was promulgated. That philoſophy has been exploded, but the remains of it, in the chriſtian ſyſtem, are ſtill but too apparent; and being manifeſtly abſurd, they expoſe it to many objections. The principal of theſe, beſides the doctrines that are peculiar to the Roman catholics, are thoſe of a trinity of perſons in the godhead, original ſin, arbitrary predeſtination, atonement for the ſins of men by the death of Chriſt, and (which has perhaps been as great a cauſe of infidelity as any other) the doctrine of the plenary inſpiration of the ſcriptures.

The objections of unbelievers have been a principal means of leading learned chriſtians to conſider theſe ſuppoſed doctrines of chriſtianity; and the conſequence of this examination has been a clear diſcovery that thoſe long received articles of faith (profeſſed in all the eſtabliſhed churches in chriſtendom) are no part of the ſyſtem of revelation, but utterly repugnant to the genuine principles of it. This I

muſt take for granted at preſent, contenting myſelf with appealing to the writings of learned chriſtians on the ſubject, and to my *Hiſtory of the Corruptions of Chriſtianity*.

You will naturally aſk me, what is there left of the ſyſtem of revelation, when the above-mentioned ſpurious doctrines are cut off from it; and it may be proper, before I proceed any farther in this correſpondence, to give you ſatisfaction on that head, that you may be fully apprized what it is that I call *chriſtianity*, for the truth of which I think it of ſo much conſequence to contend. I therefore anſwer your queſtion by ſaying, that chriſtian faith implies a belief of all the great hiſtorical facts recorded in the Old and New Teſtament, in which we are informed concerning the creation and government of the world, the hiſtory of the diſcourſes, miracles, death, and reſurrection of Chriſt, and his aſſurance of the reſurrection of all the dead to a future life of retribution; and this is the doctrine that is of the moſt conſequence, to enforce the good conduct of men.

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Admitting the truth of all the doctrines which have been abundantly proved to be ſpurious, their *value* (eſtimated by their influence on the morals of men) cannot be ſuppoſed, even by the admirers of them, to be of any moment compared to this; and in the opinion of thoſe who reject them, they have a very unfavourable tendency, giving wrong impreſſions concerning the character and moral government of God, and ſuch as muſt tend, if they have any effect at all, to relax the obligations of virtue. This doctrine, therefore, viz that of the reſurrection of the human race to a future life of retribution, I conſider as the great doctrine of revelation, to which every thing elſe belonging to the ſyſtem is introductory, or in ſome other reſpect ſubſervient.

If you wiſh to know what, in my opinion, a chriſtian is bound to believe with reſpect to *the ſcriptures*, I anſwer, that the books which are univerſally received as *authentic*, are to be conſidered as faithful records of paſt tranſactions, and eſpecially the

account of the intercourſe that the Divine Being has kept up with mankind from the beginning of the world to the time of our Saviour and his apoſtles. No chriſtian is anſwerable for more than this.

The writers of the books of ſcripture were *men*, and therefore *fallible*; but all that we have to do with them is in the character of *hiſtorians*, and *witneſſes* of what they heard and ſaw. Of courſe, their credibility is to be eſtimated like that of other hiſtorians, viz. from the circumſtances in which they wrote, as with reſpect to their opportunities of knowing the truth of what they relate, and the biaſſes to which they might be ſubject. Like all other hiſtorians, they were liable to miſtakes with reſpect to things of ſmall moment, becauſe they might not give ſufficient attention to them; and with reſpect to their *reaſoning*, we are fully at liberty to judge of it, as well as of that of any other men, by a due conſideration of the propoſitions they advance, and the arguments they allege. For it by no means follows, that becauſe a

man has had communications with the deity for certain purpoſes, and he may be depended upon with reſpect to his account of thoſe communications, that he is, in other reſpects, more wiſe and knowing than other men. Such is the chriſtianity that I profeſs to defend, and by no means what has too generally been conſidered as ſuch.

I am, &c.

LETTER VI.

Of the Hiſtory of the Jewiſh Religion.

DEAR SIR,

AS few of the *facts* which I ſhall have occaſion to mention will be conteſted, I ſhall not dwell ſo much upon the proof of them, as upon the connexion they have with the divine miſſion of Moſes and the prophets, and that of Chriſt and the apoſtles. For this is the circumſtance that

appears to me to have been chiefly overlooked by unbelievers. They ſometimes readily acknowledge the facts, but they do not attend to the neceſſary conſequences of that acknowledgment. This has ariſen from their want of attention to the principles of human nature, and the well known feelings and affections of all men in ſimilar ſituations.

As the Jewiſh religion has been more objected to than the chriſtian, I ſhall begin with the facts on which the truth of the divine miſſion of Moſes is founded, before I proceed to that of Chriſt; and I hope to ſatisfy you that, even in this caſe, unbelievers are far from having any advantage in the argument, and that they ought to have attended to the *facts*, and the circumſtances of them more cloſely than they have yet done.

It has been much the cuſtom with unbelievers, ſuch as Voltaire, &c. to divert themſelves and their readers with the hiſtory of the Jews, with ſome of the peculiarities of their religion, and eſpecially with their ſtupidity,

pidity, obſtinacy, and ignorance, compared with the more poliſhed nations of antiquity. But it has been without conſidering that all theſe latter charges are highly unfavourable to their own object in advancing them, if it be admitted (which ſurely cannot be denied) that Jews, ſtupid and ignorant as they have been, were nevertheleſs *men*, and not a ſpecies of beings totally different from that of other men.

For it is obvious to remark, that ſo obſtinate and intractable as unbelievers deſcribe them to have been (as indeed their own hiſtory ſhews that they were) it muſt have been peculiarly difficult to impoſe upon them, with reſpect to any thing to which they were exceedingly averſe.

Alſo, from a people ſo unpoliſhed and ignorant, ſo far behind other nations in the arts of peace and war, we ſhould not naturally expect *doctrines* and *ſentiments* ſuperior to any thing of the kind that we find in the moſt improved nations. And yet the bare inſpection of their writings proves that, with reſpect to religion, and the

doctrines concerning God, and providence, the Jews were in a high degree *knowing*, and all other nations ignorant and barbarous. In these respects, therefore, the Jews must have been possessed of advantages superior to those of other nations; and if these advantages were not *natural*, they must have been of a supernatural kind.

It must be allowed as a striking fact, that the religion of the Jews was most essentially different from that of any other nation in the ancient world. They had, indeed, in common with them sacrifices, certain modes of purification, a temple, an altar, and priests, which seem to have been almost essential to all the modes of ancient religious worship. But the *object of their worship* was quite different, and infinitely superior to any thing that other nations looked up to. Also what we may call the *morality* of their worship, the character of the rites of it, and the temper and disposition of mind promoted by it, were still more different. In all these essential particulars, the religion of the Jews was so strikingly different from

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that of any of their neighbouring nations, that it could never have been derived from any of them, and an attachment to the one muſt have created an averſion to the other.

The objects of worſhip with the Egyptians, Babylonians, Tyrians, Syrians, Aſſyrians, Philiſtines, and Arabians, under all their different denominations, as Edomites, Moabites, Ammonites, &c. were the ſun, moon, and ſtars, and other viſible objects, which they ſuppoſed to be animated, and on the influence of which they ſuppoſed their good and bad fortune depended. But in the religion of the Jews, the maxims of which are clearly laid down in their ſacred writings, we find that all their worſhip was confined to one inviſible and omnipreſent deity, the maker and governor of all things, from whom the ſun, moon, and ſtars, with every thing elſe, viſible and inviſible, derived their exiſtence, and at whoſe diſpoſal they all conſtantly are.

Now as the Jews, though an ancient nation, were not ſo ancient as the Egyptians, or any of the other nations mentioned above,

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by whom they were completely ſurrounded; and as, with reſpect to natural ſcience, it is acknowledged that they were much behind them, how came they poſſeſſed of ſuch juſt and ſublime conceptions with reſpect to the ſubject of *religion*, and of whom could they have learned ſuch rational worſhip? This *effect*, as well as every other, muſt have had an adequate *cauſe*, and, the circumſtances of the Jews conſidered, I ſee no adequate cauſe of ſo great an effect beſides thoſe divine communications, which are recorded in the books of Moſes; which ſhew that the univerſal parent made choice of that nation, obſtinate and ſtupid as it always was, to be the means of preſerving in the world the true knowledge of himſelf, and the purity of his worſhip, amidſt the univerſal degeneracy of the reſt of mankind.

That this was an object worthy of the interpoſition of the parent of mankind, who had at heart the happineſs of his offspring, we muſt be convinced, if we conſider the moral character, as we may ſay, of the religious worſhip of the Jews, and that of

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their neighbouring nations. All these nations, without exception, connected with their worship (on principles which I have no occasion to examine at present, but they *did* universally connect with it, and incorporate into it) ceremonies, some of which were most horribly barbarous, and others of a most impure nature. Their priests cut and mangled themselves, and practised the most dreadful mortifications in the course of their worship. Human sacrifices were authorised in all those religions, and were very frequent in some of them. Parents did not spare their own children, but madly devoted them to death, and even the most dreadful of all deaths, that of burning alive, to appease the wrath, or secure the favour of their gods, and they gloried in thus sacrificing still greater numbers of their enemies, with every circumstance of insult and barbarity. For this we have not only the testimony of Jewish writers, but the most unexceptionable evidence of Greeks and Romans, who themselves, even in a pretty late period, were not entirely free from the same horrid

horrid rites. The Carthaginians facrificed at one time three hundred youths of the beſt families in the city; and their religion was that of the Tyrians, one of the moſt diſtinguiſhed nations in the neighbourhood of Judea.

All theſe neighbouring nations alſo, without exception, practiſed the moſt impure, as well as the moſt cruel rites, in honour of their gods, and their public feſtivals were, in general, ſcenes of riot and debauchery. Beſides many ſhocking indecencies, which cannot be recited, women, in other reſpects chaſte, thought proſtitution (in which the choice of a partner was excluded) a neceſſary mode of recommending themſelves to the favour of their deities, and in ſome caſes even ſodomy and beſtiality, were thought to be proper.

If the ſevere and cruel rites above-mentioned, did not deter men from the practiſe of theſe religions, we may be well aſſured that the laſciviouſneſs and debauchery which they encouraged would not do it. Accordingly we find, in all nations, a kind of

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rage for the ceremonies of these religions. The family of Abraham had been idolaters in Chaldæa, the Israelites had conformed to the religion of Egypt, and their whole history afterwards shews, that they had a proneness to the religious rites of their neighbours, which even astonishes us, when we consider the awful and repeated warnings of their prophets, and the dreadful calamities which, agreeably to their predictions, never failed to overtake them in consequence of their idolatry.

Now, how can we account for Abraham abandoning the religion of his country (to say nothing of his removing to so great a distance from it) and the Israelites, when they were become a nation, relinquishing the rites of the Egyptians, and adopting a religion and ceremonies of so very different a nature? This is what no nation ever did of a sudden voluntarily, or could ever be brought to do involuntarily, by ordinary means; and that this was involuntarily on the part of the Israelites, is most evident from their frequent relapses into their former

ner ſuperſtitions, from which they were with great difficulty reclaimed.

The only poſſible explanation of this wonderful *fact*, I will venture to ſay, is to be found in the books of Moſes, and other writings of the Old Teſtament, in which we have an authentic account of the frequent interpoſitions of the Divine Being to bring about ſo great an event by miracles, which the obſtinacy and incredulity of that nation, great as they always were, were not able to withſtand. What could have reſtrained this people when they ſo often relapſed into idolatry, but thoſe frequent interpoſitions, an hiſtorical account of which is preſerved in their writings, and which at length fully convinced them, that the eye of God was in a more particular manner upon their nation; and that though he thought proper to connive at the idolatry of other nations, which had not been diſtinguiſhed by him as theirs had been, he would not bear with *them*; but that, at all events, by their proſperity or adverſity, they were to be a leſſon to the whole world;

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to teach all nations the great doctrine of the unity of God, the universality of his dominion, and the purity of his worship. This is a clear and satisfactory account of the fact, and without this supposition it is absolutely inexplicable.

If we consider the miracles of which we have an account in the books of Moses (which were unquestionably written at the time when they are said to have been performed) we see them to have been wonderfully calculated to produce this effect; and they were of such a nature, as that no nation whatever could have been deceived into the belief of them, even if they had been as well disposed, as we know they were ill disposed, towards the object of them.

When the great scene opens, the Israelites were in the most abject state of slavery in Egypt, without the least prospect of relief, their oppressors being a warlike nation, themselves unused to arms, and no foreign power to take their part. Yet, though these warlike Egyptians, who derived the greatest

greateſt advantages from their ſervitude, did every thing in their power to detain them, they actually marched out of the country, without leaving any part of their property behind; they paſſed forty years in a wilderneſs, from which ſo great a multitude could not have derived ſufficient ſuſtenance; and they took poſſeſſion of a country occupied by ſeveral numerous and warlike nations. Such are the *facts*, and I ſee no probable method of accounting for them, but upon the ſuppoſition of the truth of thoſe miracles, which are recorded in the writings of Moſes, and which explain the whole in the moſt ſatisfactory manner.

According to this account, the Iſraelites entirely deſpirited, and, though oppreſſed, yet become Egyptians in their worſhip and inclinations, are brought with great difficulty to conceive ſome hope of their deliverance by the aſſurances of Moſes, one of their brethren, who had fled from Egypt, and had been forty years ſettled in Arabia. He told them, that the God of their fathers had appeared to him, and notwithſtanding

ſtanding his reluctance to undertake the commiſſion, had enjoined him to demand their releaſe of Pharoah; and as a proof of his divine miſſion, had empowered him to work ſeveral miracles, a ſpecimen of which he was commiſſioned to exhibit before them.

Pharoah, as was natural, received the propoſal with great indignation, and increaſed his oppreſſion of the people; but by the infliction of the moſt extraordinary judgments, and thoſe of the moſt public nature (with reſpect to which his own magicians confeſſed that the finger of God was in them, and the laſt of which was the death of the firſt-born in every Egyptian family in one night) he was brought to comply with the demand. Repenting of this conceſſion, he purſued the unarmed multitude, encumbered with all their cattle and baggage, with a large army, determined to force them to return. While the Iſraelites were in the utmoſt conſternation, having Pharoah and his army behind them, and the Red Sea before them, the ſea opened, and made a way for their

eſcape, and Pharoah and his army, who purſued them into the ſea, were all drowned.

Preſently after this, many illuſtrious miracles having been wrought for their relief, particularly ſupplying them with food and water in a miraculous manner, to ſuffice ſo great a multitude, God, in an audible voice from Mount Sinai, in the hearing of all the people, which muſt have exceeded three millions, ſtanding at ſome diſtance from the foot of the mountain, ſo as to be far out of the hearing of any human voice, or any inſtrument in aid of articulation, delivered all the words of the ten commandments, with the preamble to them. This was accompanied with thunder and lightning, and a cloud covering the mountain; and of this awful appearance the people had regular notice ſome time before. The reſt of the law was delivered to Moſes himſelf, whoſe commiſſion was ſo abundantly atteſted, that though there were ſeveral formidable conſpiracies againſt him (in one of which his own brother Aaron, who muſt have been in the ſecret of all his meaſures,

ſures, was concerned) and though his conduct often gave the greateſt offence to all the people, and he was himſelf of a meek and placid nature, and ſo unqualified for command in war, that another was always employed whenever they had occaſion to take the field; his authority was fully ſupported.

After the expiration of forty years, the Iſraelites croſſed the river Jordan in the ſame manner as they had croſſed the Red ſea, marching through the channel on dry ground; the walls of the firſt city which they beſieged, fell down of their own accord, and in a ſhort time, notwithſtanding the oppoſition of the numerous and warlike inhabitants of the country, the Iſraelites took poſſeſſion of it.

Such is the account that the books of Moſes and of Joſhua give of theſe things, and to ſay nothing of the internal marks of credibility in the writings of Moſes, which bear as evident traces of authenticity, as any narrative, or journal of events, that was ever written, the miracles introduced into

the hiſtory, ſupply the only poſſible hypotheſis to account for the reſt. A fact which cannot be denied, is the *belief* of all the Iſraelitiſh nation, from that time to the preſent, that ſuch events did take place, that the hiſtory we now have of them was written by Moſes himſelf, till near the time of his death, and that the narrative was continued by other perſons who recorded the events of their own times.

If the antiquity of the books of Moſes, &c. be denied, it ſtill remains to be accounted for, how all the nation could, at any period of time, be made to believe that their anceſtors had come from Egypt, through the Red Sea, and the river Jordan, and that ſuch a *law* as theirs had been delivered in an audible voice from Mount Sinai, when none of thoſe things had ever happened. This is not more probable, than that the Engliſh nation ſhould at this time be brought to believe that their anceſtors originally came from France, and that they croſſed from Calais to Dover without ſhips.

An attempt to impoſe upon a whole nation ſuch an account as this, and eſpecially a hiſtory of the events ſaid to have been written at the time, when nothing of the kind had been heard of before, would at any period be treated with ridicule and neglect. No people ever were, or ever can be, ſo impoſed upon, eſpecially when the things propoſed to them are ſo diſagreeable and burthenſome as the laws of Moſes certainly were to the Jewiſh nation.

The belief of the fabulous hiſtories of the Greek and Roman divinities, and of their intercourſe with mortals, ſuch as we read of in Ovid's Metamorphoſes, &c. can bear no compariſon with the belief of all the contents of the books of Moſes by the nation of the Jews. It was never pretended that there was any hiſtory of the heathen gods and of their intercourſe with mankind, written at the time of the events, of which copies were ordered to be taken, and which was to be recited annually in the preſence of all the people, which was the caſe with reſpect to the laws of Moſes. All the ſtories of the

heathen mythology are related with irreconcileable varieties, and the belief of them had probably never much hold of intelligent perſons, and kept decreaſing till, in a courſe of time, the ſtories were ſuppoſed to be in a great meaſure allegorical, contrived to expreſs ſome myſtical or moral truth; and at length, this whole ſyſtem of heatheniſm was effectually diſcredited, and ſunk into univerſal contempt.

On the contrary, the whole body of the Jewiſh nation, attached as they formerly were to the ſuperſtitions of their neighbours, never entertained a doubt with reſpect to any of the contents of the books of Moſes. That there were ſuch perſons as Abraham, Iſaac, and Jacob, Moſes and Aaron, &c. and that the things recorded of them were true, they always believed, as firmly as we do the hiſtory of Julius Cæſar, or William the Conqueror; and though the nation has continued ſeveral thouſand years, and has been near two thouſand years diſperſed among all other nations, their belief in the ancient hiſtory of their nation, and their reſpect for

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the books which contain it, are not in the leaſt diminiſhed.

There is no example of any other nation ſuffering as the Jews have done, without being utterly loſt, and confounded with the common maſs of mankind, and their religious cuſtoms diſappearing with them. The ſmall remains of fire worſhippers in one corner of Indoſtan, where they are ſuffered to live unmoleſted, and who find little inconvenience from their religion, is not to be mentioned with the attachment of the Jews to theirs; without conſidering this as a fulfilment of a prophecy delivered ſo early as the time of Moſes, and frequently repeated in later periods. This alone, I will venture to ſay, is a fact which no philoſopher can account for, without admitting the authenticity of the books which contain the principles of the Jewiſh religion, and the truth of the miracles by which it was proved to be divine.

LETTER VII.

Of the hiſtorical Evidence of the Truth of Chriſtianity.

DEAR SIR,

THE proof of the truth of *chriſtianity* from the reception it met with in the world, is ſimilar to that of the Jewiſh religion, but ſomething clearer, as falling within the compaſs of authentic hiſtory, ſo that the great facts are the more eaſily aſcertained. Indeed, all that is requiſite to eſtabliſh the truth of it is univerſally acknowledged; the riſe and progreſs of chriſtianity being as well known as that of the Roman empire. Conſequently it is only neceſſary to attend to the circumſtances of known facts, which are themſelves as eaſily aſcertained, as any other facts in hiſtory, to obtain as complete ſatisfaction with reſpect to it, as it is in the power of hiſtorical evidence to give. If, therefore, any perſon continue an unbeliever,

unbeliever, it muſt, in my opinion, be owing either to his not having taken proper pains to inform himſelf concerning facts, or to his having ſuch a ſtate of mind, as incapacitates him for judging concerning the nature and force of the evidence.

That the goſpels and the book of Acts, which contain the hiſtory of the riſe and firſt progreſs of chriſtianity, are genuine productions of the age to which they are uſually aſcribed, viz. ſome time before the deſtruction of Jeruſalem, or within leſs than forty years after the death of Chriſt, and that ſome of the epiſtles of Paul were written ſeveral years before that time (the firſt of them about twenty years after the death of Chriſt) whilſt the chief actors in the ſcene, and many of the witneſſes of the great facts were living, I muſt take for granted, becauſe this does not appear ever to have been diſputed; and there is as much evidence of it as there is of the genuineneſs of any hiſtories that were ever publiſhed. It could not, therefore but have been well known at the time of the publication, whether the tranſactions

actions recorded in those books really happened; and so great was the attention that was given to the subject, and the credit that was given to the books, that innumerable copies were immediately taken, they were soon translated into various foreign languages, and they were quoted and appealed to in the earliest ages by the different sects into which christians were soon divided. It is fact, therefore, that these histories were esteemed as true by great numbers, who were more competent judges in the case than any persons now living in England can be of the revolution under King William.

To say nothing of the universal reception of the epistles of Paul, as really *his*, I will venture to say that, it is as impossible for any impartial person to peruse them without being as well satisfied with respect to their genuineness, as to those of Cicero; the mention of particular events, persons, and places, being so frequent in them, so consistent with each other, and with the history of the time.

According

According to the tenor of these writings, there were thousands of Jews in Jerusalem itself, as well as great numbers in other places, who became christians, in consequence of entertaining no doubt concerning the truth of the miracles, the death, and resurrection of Christ, and also the miracles wrought by the apostles afterwards. The facts were such as no person then living expected, so as to be previously prepared to receive; and the converts were so far from gaining any thing by their belief, that they were thereby exposed to every possible inconvenience, loss of property, disgrace, every mode of torture, and death. Paul himself was at the first a zealous persecutor of the christians, and had the greatest prospect of preferment and advantage from persisting in his opposition to them. Yet even *he* was so fully convinced of the truth of christianity, and was so sensible of the importance of it, that he became one of its most zealous preachers, and for a period of about thirty years, he actually went through the greatest labours and hardships in the propagation

propagation of the gospel, uniformly declaring that he had no expectation of any thing better in this life; and at length he, together with innumerable others, who had the same persuasion, chearfully laid down his life, rather than abandon his profession.

Now what kind of beings must the writers of the gospels and of the book of Acts have been, and what kind of beings must have been the thousands of that generation who received their accounts as true, and especially at such a risk (which abundantly implies that they had every motive for making enquiry, and satisfying themselves concerning the facts) if, after all, there was no truth in the accounts?

What should we think of a set of writers, who should uniformly relate, that in the war of 1755, the French completely conquered all North America, the whole of Ireland, and a great part of England, which at length was reduced to be a province of France? Would it be possible for a thousand such writers to gain the least credit? or, if they did, would not the tens of thousands, who

who well knew that the ſtory was very far from being true, and that the preſent ſtate of things proves it to be ſo, ſay, that they were under ſome ſtrange infatuation; and if, in a courſe of time, ſuch hiſtories ſhould gain any credit, would there not be many more writers to confute the account, and would not the truth ſoon prevail over all the arts of falſhood?

We may therefore ſafely conclude, that ſince the hiſtory of the miracles, the death, and the reſurrection of Chriſt, and alſo that of the miracles wrought by the apoſtles, was received as true by ſuch numbers of perſons in the age in which they were publiſhed, and the account was never confuted, but chriſtianity kept gaining ground from that time to the preſent, the great *facts* on which its credit ſtands were unqueſtionably true. A falſhood of this nature could never have been propagated as this was. They who firſt received thoſe books muſt have been previouſly acquainted with the hiſtory which they contained. The hiſtories were, in fact, an appeal to the evidence of thoſe

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into whoſe hands they were put, and their reception of them is the moſt expreſs ſanction that could be given to them.

That the hiſtory of Chriſt and the apoſtles could not have eſtabliſhed itſelf without the moſt rigid enquiry into its truth, is evident from the perſecution of chriſtians, which began immediately after its firſt promulgation, and in Jeruſalem itſelf, the very ſcene of the tranſactions. In theſe circumſtances men had every motive, and every opportunity, for enquiring whether they ſacrificed their reputation, their properties, and their lives, for an idle tale, or for a truth of the greateſt certainty and importance. All theſe things being conſidered, it appears to me that no facts, in the whole compaſs of hiſtory, are ſo well authenticated as thoſe of the miracles, the death, and the reſurrection of Chriſt, and alſo what is related of the apoſtles in the book of Acts.

As to the reſurrection of Chriſt, on which ſo much depends, the evidence of it is ſo circumſtanced, as to be moſt wonderfully adapted to eſtabliſh itſelf in the remoteſt

moteſt periods of time. That Chriſt really *died*, cannot be doubted, when it is conſidered that he was put to death by his enemies, and that in the moſt public manner. The ſame perſons alſo, who were moſt nearly intereſted in his not appearing any more, had the care of his ſepulchre; and being apprized of his having foretold that he ſhould riſe again, would, no doubt, take effectual care to guard againſt all impoſition in the caſe. Had there been any tolerably well founded ſuſpicion that the guards of the ſepulchre had been overpowered, or frightened away, by the friends of Chriſt, and that the body had been ſecreted by them, they would certainly have been apprehended and examined; and whether the body had been found, or not, the very poſſibility of its having been conveyed away would have prevented any credit being given to their account of the reſurrection.

No perſon can reaſonably object to the *number*, or the *quality*, of thoſe who were the witneſſes of Chriſt's reſurrection, as they were perſons who, without any hope of ſee-

ing him again, were the moſt perfectly acquainted with him, and had ſufficient opportunity of ſatisfying themſelves that it was the ſame perſon. He was ſeen at firſt, when he was not at all expected, and afterwards by particular appointment, and eſpecially in Galilee, when more than five hundred perſons were preſent, and in the ſight of a great number of them he went up into heaven.

Paul, one of the greateſt enemies of his cauſe, one whom the Jews in general would probably have choſen, if they had been required to name any perſon whoſe converſion they thought the leaſt probable, was ſatisfied, by the evidence of his own ſenſes, that Jeſus was really riſen, he having appeared to *him*, as he had done to others before his aſcenſion. Beſides, all the miracles wrought by the apoſtles, which are as well atteſted as thoſe of our Saviour himſelf, are a proof of the fact of the reſurrection. For had Chriſt died as a common malefactor, and there had been nothing extraordinary in his previous hiſtory, it cannot be ſuppoſed that

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any perſons would have been empowered by God to work miracles in proof of their divine miſſion, which evidently depended upon his.

Had Chriſt, after his reſurrection, appeared in public, diſcourſing in the temple, and confronting his judges and Pilate, many more, no doubt, would have been ſatisfied that he was really riſen from the dead. But divine providence is abundantly vindicated in affording men only reaſonable evidence of truth, ſufficient to ſatisfy all that are truly impartial, who really wiſh to know the truth, and in withholding what is ſuperfluous for that purpoſe. And had the demand of unbelievers in this reſpect been granted, and the effect which they ſuppoſe would have followed from it really taken place, it would have been a circumſtance exceedingly unfavourable to the credit of the ſtory in the preſent, and much more in any future age.

Had the Jews of that age in general been converted, and conſequently there had been no perſecution of chriſtians in Judea, it

would certainly have been ſaid, that chriſtianity was a contrivance of the heads of the nation, and ſuch as we have now no opportunity of detecting. Upon the whole, therefore, to thoſe who conſider the nature of evidence, the hiſtory of the reſurrection of Chriſt is much better authenticated by ſuch evidence as is now exiſting, than it would have been in any other circumſtances than we can at preſent deviſe to ſtrengthen it. For whatever we might add to it in ſome reſpects, we muſt take from it in others. So far does the wiſdom of God exceed that of man.

Next to our having ourſelves ſufficient opportunity, and likewiſe ſufficient motives to examine into the truth of this important fact, is the certainty that thoſe who were then preſent had both the opportunity and the motive. As things are now circumſtanced, it will never be in the power of the enemies of chriſtianity to ſay (what they might have ſaid, if their demands with reſpect to the reſurrection of Chriſt had been granted) that his religion was aided

aided by the powers of this world. On the contrary, from the very beginning, it encountered all the oppoſition which the power and policy of man could bring againſt it, and had nothing but its own proper evidence to ſupport it. But this alone was ſuch as to enable it to do what all the power and wiſdom of man was altogether unequal to, viz. to eſtabliſh itſelf through the whole extent of the Roman empire, and even beyond the bounds of it, and finally to triumph over all the various ſyſtems of idolatry and ſuperſtition, which for ages had prevailed in it.

I am,

Yours, &c.

LETTER VIII.

Of the Cauſes of Infidelity in early Times.

DEAR SIR,

YOU ſay, that if the facts on which the truth of chriſtianity depends were true, if Chriſt really wrought miracles, and the apoſtles after him; if he really died, and roſe again from the dead; and if the evidence of theſe facts was ſufficient to ſatisfy ſuch great numbers as the hiſtory of the book of Acts repreſents; it is extraordinary that it did not convince *all*, and that all mankind did not immediately become chriſtians. All the world, you ſay, was ſoon convinced of the truth of ſuch events as the death of Cæſar in the ſenate-houſe, and the defeat of Marc Antony by Auguſtus. But a conſideration of the principles of human nature, and our daily obſervation of the hiſtory of opinions, and the progreſs of truth,

truth, will ſatisfy all who are truly philoſophical and attentive, that what you ſuppoſe muſt have taken place was not to be expected.

Two things are requiſite to any perſon's giving his aſſent to a propoſition of any kind, independent of its evidence, viz. an attention to that evidence, and alſo an impartial mind, free from any bias that might indiſpoſe him to receive and acknowledge it; and one or other of theſe appears to have been wanting in the generality of mankind, with reſpect to the truth of the goſpel at the time of its promulgation, and for a conſiderable period afterwards.

With reſpect to all common events, ſuch as the deaths of particular perſons, an account of battles and their conſequences, &c. there is nothing ſo improbable in their nature, but that all mankind muſt be ſatisfied that any thing of this kind may well happen, and the immediate conſequences of the deaths of great men, and of great victories, are very ſoon and univerſally felt; ſo that

it is abſolutely impoſſible that any doubt ſhould long remain with reſpect to them. But this could not be the caſe with reſpect to ſuch events as that of the miracles and reſurrection of Chriſt; theſe having no ſuch connexion with the ſtate of public affairs, as that they could not but have been immediately known to every body. There was nothing to excite attention to them but the intereſt which each perſon, individually conſidered, had in them, and the zeal of thoſe who were converts themſelves to make converts of others.

Admitting the zeal of the firſt believers to have been ever ſo great, thoſe to whom they addreſſed themſelves would not believe what they heard till they had an opportunity of enquiring into the truth of it. They would alſo compare the accounts of others, and in many caſes this would be a proceſs which would neceſſarily take a conſiderable *time*, even with reſpect to the town or village in which the tranſactions took place, and much more time would

would be requiſite before the belief of ſuch extraordinary things could become general, and well eſtabliſhed, in diſtant places.

Beſides, the belief of chriſtianity is not merely the belief of certain extraordinary *facts*, but includes likewiſe *inferences* from thoſe facts, and many perſons might admit the former without proceeding to the latter. That Chriſt had a divine miſſion, and was authorized by God to teach the doctrine of a future ſtate, we juſtly think to be the neceſſary conſequence of his working real miracles, and of his reſurrection from the dead; and there are few perſons, I imagine, in the preſent age, who will admit theſe facts, and heſitate to draw this concluſion. But we find that the facts were admitted, and yet the concluſion not drawn, by many perſons at the time of the promulgation of chriſtianity.

The unbelieving Jews aſcribed the moſt extraordinary of our Saviour's miracles to the agency of demons, and the heathen world in general had great faith in *magic*; really believing that the moſt extraordinary

effects might be produced by pronouncing certain words, and performing certain ceremonies; these having, in their opinion, some unknown, but necessary connexion with the interposition of invisible powers. For it was by no means the firm belief of mankind in that age (though it will now be considered as an incontrovertible truth) that real miracles, or a deviation from the established laws of nature, can be produced by no other power than the great author of nature himself, or, which comes to the same thing, by some superior Being authorized by him. They might therefore admit the miracles of Christ, and those of the apostles, without being immediately satisfied that what they taught was true; and still less that they were under obligation to make a public profession of christianity, at the risk of all that was dear to them in life, and even of life itself. There are many steps in this progress, and many persons would stop in all of them; so that the number of declared christians might bear but a small proportion to what they

would have been, if their becoming ſo had depended upon nothing but the ſimple evidence of the truth of thoſe facts, which, it will now be acknowledged, neceſſarily implies the truth of chriſtianity. When the number of its declared converts is conſidered, and compared with the ſituation of things in the age of the apoſtles, it will be found to be fully equal to what might have been expected, upon the ſuppoſition of the truth of every thing which is recorded in the goſpels, and the book of Acts.

Of thoſe perſons to whom the facts were previouſly known, ſo that it was not neceſſary to produce any *evidence* of them, three thouſand were converted in one day, on the ſpeech of Peter, on the day of pentecoſt, in which he could ſay to them, Acts ii. 22. "Ye Men of Iſrael, hear theſe words, Jeſus "of Nazareth, a Man approved of God "among you, by miracles, and wonders, "and ſigns, which God did by him, in the "midſt of you, as ye yourſelves alſo know, "&c. this Jeſus hath God raiſed up, "whereof we are all witneſſes." And the

perſons

perſons then preſent with him were an hundred and twenty. After the firſt miracle performed by Peter and John, viz. the ſudden cure of a man who was well known to have been lame from his birth, the number of male converts was five thouſand, ſo that, including women, they may be ſuppoſed to have been about ten thouſand. This was in Jeruſalem only, the ſcene of the great tranſactions.

In diſtant places, the preaching of the apoſtles, and of their diſciples, as might be expected, had no ſuch ſudden effect. A few converts in any particular place, were made at firſt, and their numbers kept increaſing gradually. But within the age of the apoſtles (who did not preach without the limits of Judea, or to any gentiles, till about ten years after the death of Chriſt) there were chriſtian churches in all the great cities of the Roman empire, and many of them were very numerous; ſo as to be full of factions among themſelves, as appears by the epiſtles of Paul to ſeveral of them. In the villages there were fewer

chriſtians

chriſtians than in the towns, the inhabitants of them being more out of the way of receiving intelligence concerning what had paſſed at ſo great a diſtance. This, it muſt be acknowledged, was agreeable to the natural courſe of things.

Beſide the aſſertion of a divine miſſion, Jeſus laid claim to the character of the *meſſiah* foretold in the Jewiſh prophecies, and the perſuaſion of the whole body of the Jewiſh nation concerning the temporal reign of their meſſiah, was ſo deeply rooted in their minds, that whatever miracles Jeſus had wrought, it could not be expected that many of them would receive ſuch a perſon as he was in that character, eſpecially after his ignominious death. They might think that there was ſomething very extraordinary in the caſe, and what they could not ſatisfactorily account for, without receiving him as their meſſiah. Beſides, the manner in which Chriſt had expoſed the vices of the ſcribes, phariſees, and chief prieſts, who were the leading men among the Jews, muſt have provoked the ambitious and worldly-minded

minded among them to ſuch a degree, as that no evidence, or reaſon whatever, could reconcile them to his pretenſions, ſo as to make them ready to lay down their lives for their adherence to him whom they themſelves had put to death.

Such a revolution in the ſtate of men's minds, will not be expected by any who have a knowledge of mankind; and conſidering the great number of thoſe who may be called the perſonal enemies of Chriſt, and their influence with others, together with their attachment to the notion of a temporal deliverer, and their opinion of the power of dæmons, the number of Jewiſh converts in the age of the apoſtles, was certainly as great as could reaſonably be expected. We find a conſiderable body of them in all the cities of the Roman empire in which Jews were reſident. To them we always find the apoſtle Paul preached in the firſt place, and he never failed to convince ſome of *them* before he particularly addreſſed himſelf to the gentiles; and it cannot be doubted, but that the number of Jewiſh

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as well as of gentile chriſtians, kept encreaſing; though it is but little that we know of the former, on account of the latter having little intercourſe with them; and they are the writings of the gentile chriſtians only that are come down to us.

After the ſecond century, it is probable that there was no great addition made to the number of Jewiſh converts. But we ſhall the leſs wonder at this, when it is conſidered, that, beſides the preceding cauſes, which muſt have indiſpoſed all Jews to receive Jeſus as their Meſſiah, the doctrines of the pre-exiſtence and of the divinity of Chriſt, which (being directly contrary to what they had been taught in the prophets concerning the Meſſiah) were in the higheſt degree offenſive to them, were advanced. Theſe doctrines, ſo foreign to the genuine principles of both Judaiſm and chriſtianity, were generally received by the learned chriſtians, who were the preachers, and writers of the age; and ſome time after the council of Nice, they were the general belief of the whole chriſtian world. Such doctrines as

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theſe, which were repreſented as eſſential to chriſtianity, a Jew might think himſelf not obliged even to conſider, or examine. This has continued to be the ſtate of things with the Jews to this very day, as I find by their writings and converſation.

The heathen world in general were ſtrongly attached to their ſeveral ſuperſtitions. Their religion entered into all their civil tranſactions, ſo that the buſineſs of every day bore ſome traces of it, every feſtivity to which they had been accuſtomed, and every thing connected with pleaſure and the enjoyment of life was connected with it, and a part of it*. To abandon all this, implies much more than the mere reception of

* "The religion of the nations," ſays Mr. Gibbon, p. 513, "was not merely a ſpeculative doctrine, pro-
"feſſed in the ſchools, or preached in the temples. The
"innumerable duties and rites of polytheiſm were cloſely
"interwoven with every circumſtance of buſineſs or plea-
"ſure, of public or of private life; and it ſeemed impoſ-
"ſible to eſcape the obſervance of them without at the
"ſame time renouncing the commerce of mankind, and
"all the offices and amuſements of ſociety," many particulars of which he proceeds to enumerate.

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new truth. It was almoſt equivalent to making men over again. In fact, there is no example in the hiſtory of the world before the time of Chriſt, of any nation or conſiderable body of men, changing their religion, except the primitive one for the idolatry and ſuperſtition which then univerſally prevailed. Conqueſts had frequently been made, and the greateſt revolutions in the ſtate of empires, and of arts and ſciences, had taken place, but theſe were all eaſy things compared to a revolution in matters of religion. This, therefore, could not be expected to be accompliſhed in a ſhort time. That it did take place ſo completely as it afterwards did, in all the ancient world, that it was in time effected by chriſtianity, when philoſophy had not been able to contribute any thing towards it, is the moſt wonderful event in the hiſtory of mankind, and what nothing could have produced, but the fulleſt evidence of the miracles and reſurrection of Chriſt; and this being of the hiſtorical kind, neceſſarily required *time* to eſtabliſh itſelf.

When the magnitude of this effect is conſidered, we ſee a reaſon for all the miracles of Chriſt, and alſo for thoſe that were wrought by the apoſtles afterwards. For, we may eaſily imagine that in Greece, or at Rome, no evidence of miracles wrought in Judea, would have been much attended to, if the inhabitants of thoſe diſtant places had not been witneſſes of ſimilar miracles wrought before their own eyes. But theſe were ſo numerous, and the knowledge of them extended ſo far, that, great as the effect was, they were ſufficient at length to accompliſh their purpoſe.

As to the more learned among the gentiles, whether they had been uſed to treat all religion with contempt, which in that age was the caſe with many, or to reverence the eſtabliſhment under which they lived, which continued to be the caſe with others, we may eaſily imagine how they would be affected at the firſt hearing of miracles wrought in a diſtant country, and to ſupport the claim of a divine miſſion by a crucified malefactor. By ſuch perſons it cannot but be

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ſuppoſed that the preaching of chriſtianity would be treated with ridicule; and nothing but the knowledge and evidence of it being *obtruded* upon them (which could only happen in very peculiar circumſtances) could induce them to make any enquiry about it. And what effect can evidence produce without *attention* and a due *examination* of it?

Some have expreſſed their ſurprize that ſuch perſons as Seneca, Pliny, and Tacitus, did not become chriſtians. But can we be ſure that either Seneca, or Tacitus took any pains to inform themſelves about chriſtianity? It is pretty evident that Pliny did not. But his caſe, and that of other ſpeculative heathens, will be conſidered more largely in a ſubſequent letter. Seneca was cotemporary with the apoſtle Paul, but do we know that he ever conferred with Paul, or any other chriſtian, upon the ſubject; and without this, what could he know, or believe, more than other men, who had never heard the name of Chriſt?

Tacitus appears to have been ſhamefully ignorant of the hiſtory of the Jews, which he might have learned from the books of Scripture, or the works of Joſephus, which were extant in Greek in his time. Had he taken the trouble to read them, he could never have given ſuch a crude and abſurd account of the Jews as he has done. He had evidently heard nothing but vague reports, derived originally from the ſcriptures, but at ſuch a diſtance, as to retain very little reſemblance to the truth. And can it ſuppoſed that a man who took no pains to inform himſelf concerning the Jews (a remarkable ancient nation, many of them diſperſed in all parts of the Roman empire) whoſe hiſtory he undertook to write, would take any more pains to inform himſelf concerning the chriſtians, who in his time were generally confounded with the Jews, whoſe hiſtory he did *not* undertake to write?

As to a later period, notwithſtanding chriſtianity kept gaining ground in ſpite of all oppoſition, its progreſs muſt have been retarded

retarded by the many diviſions among chriſtians, and the abſurd doctrines held by ſome of them, in conſequence of which many perſons, not ill-diſpoſed with reſpect to chriſtianity, might decline joining any particular denomination of chriſtians. This we ſee to be the caſe with reſpect to the catholics abroad, and many members of the eſtabliſhed church in this country. They are ſenſible enough of the errors of their reſpective ſyſtems, but they ſee thoſe who diſſent from them divided among themſelves, and hating and deſpiſing one another; and not feeling themſelves ſufficiently intereſted to examine which of them is in the right, they continue where they are. This muſt have been the caſe with many of the gentiles in the early ages of chriſtianity.

Beſides, whilſt chriſtianity was expoſed to perſecution, great numbers of a timid diſpoſition may have been well convinced of the goodneſs of the cauſe, without being able to relinquiſh their poſſeſſions, and eſpecially to loſe their lives for it, which, however, chriſtianity abſolutely requires. This

we find to have been the character of Nicodemus, and others, in our Saviour's time, and there were many ſuch in all ages. Nay, many profeſſed chriſtians renounced their profeſſion in the ſeverity of perſecution. And if this was the caſe with thoſe who, no doubt, ſtill continued to believe it, well it may be ſuppoſed that many might by the ſame means be prevented from making any profeſſion of it at all.

That this was the actual ſtate of things in the ſecond and third century, that beſides a great number of profeſſed chriſtians, there were at leaſt as many who ſecretly thought better of it than they did of the eſtabliſhed religion, was abundantly evident in the revolution made by Conſtantine; who could not with ſafety have declared himſelf a chriſtian, have given ſuch open encouragement to chriſtians, and have diſcountenanced the idolatry which had prevailed before, if the minds of the great maſs of the people had not been ſufficiently prepared for ſo great a change. And this preparation could conſiſt of nothing but a general

neral profeſſion, or at leaſt a general good opinion, of chriſtianity. Had the popular opinion at that time, been very violently againſt chriſtianity, many competitors for the empire would, no doubt, have availed themſelves of it: and indeed ſome of Conſtantine's rivals did endeavour to avail themſelves of the zeal that remained for the popular ſuperſtitions, but without effect. This change could not have been made by Marcus Aurelius, or any of the earlier emperors, if they had been chriſtians. This remarkable fact therefore, viz. the eaſy eſtabliſhment of chriſtianity, and the extinction of heatheniſm by Conſtantine, and his ſucceſſors, is of itſelf an abundant proof of the progreſs that chriſtianity had made in the preceding period.

The emperor Julian bore as much good will to heatheniſm, as Conſtantine had done to chriſtianity, but what was he able to effect? He did not chooſe to attack the new religion openly, but he diſcouraged the profeſſion of it by every method in his power. In this, however, he met with nothing but diſap-

pointment, and preſently after his death, the eſtabliſhment of chriſtianity returned like a tide in the ocean; and had any other emperor, half a century after the time of Julian, attempted as much as he did, the general opinion would, no doubt, have been ſo much againſt him, that he muſt have abdicated the empire; ſo ſtrong was the general attachment to chriſtianity in that age, notwithſtanding all the unfavourable circumſtances attending the riſe and progreſs of it. Had it been in the power of men of learning and enquiry, after the attention of mankind was ſufficiently excited to the ſubject, to have expoſed the pretenſions of Chriſt, as we can thoſe of Mahomet, it would certainly have been done before the age of Julian, or that of Conſtantine.

There is no writer from whom this might have been expected ſo much as from Joſephus, who, on account of his being cotemporary with the apoſtles, and even with Chriſt himſelf, and paſſing a great part of his life in Judea, which was the great theatre of their miracles, muſt have had

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the beſt opportunity of examining into the foundation of chriſtianity, and conſequently of detecting any fraud or impoſture that might have been employed about it. That he could not want any *inclination* to do this, is evident from his not being a chriſtian. As he gives ſo particular an account of the Jewiſh ſects, the phariſees, ſadducees, and eſſenes, why did he give no account of the chriſtians, whoſe origin was among the Jews, and who, he muſt have known, were very numerous in Judea, in all the provinces of the Roman empire, and in Rome itſelf, where he finally reſided, ſo that ſome account of them might naturally be expected in ſuch a hiſtory as his? The moſt probable account of his remarkable ſilence concerning the chriſtians is, that for ſome reaſon or other, he diſliked chriſtianity, ſo as not to chooſe to make profeſſion of it, and yet was not able to allege any thing of conſequence againſt it, and therefore, choſe to make no mention at all of the ſubject. There is no other motive for the ſilence of this writer concerning Chriſt, and the affairs of

chriſtians, that appears to me to be in the ſmalleſt degree probable. As to the teſtimony concerning Chriſt which is found in the preſent copies of his hiſtory, it has been ſufficiently proved to be ſpurious, being inconſiſtent with the other parts of his writings and with his own conduct and profeſſion.

Upon the whole, it muſt certainly appear to any perſon who is ſufficiently acquainted with the hiſtory of chriſtianity, that it had no countenance from *power*, and that even the *learning* of the age was as hoſtile to it as the civil government. What then but *truth*, under every diſadvantage, external and internal, could have procured it that eſtabliſhment which, in about three centuries, it acquired through the whole extent of the Roman empire, and even among many of the barbarous nations beyond the bounds of of it, to the extermination of all the other modes of religion which had prevailed in them before?

I am, Sir,

Yours, &c.

LETTER IX.

A more particular Account of the Nature of thoſe Prejudices to which the Heathens were ſubject with Reſpect to Chriſtianity.

DEAR SIR,

THEY who expreſs any ſurprize that chriſtianity did not make a more rapid progreſs in the world, beſides not being acquainted with the real ſtate of things in the age in which it was promulgated, do not appear to me to have given ſufficient attention to the doctrine concerning *aſſent to truth* in general, whether natural, moral, or hiſtorical.

Nothing is more obſervable, than that when the mind is prepoſſeſſed in favour of any particular opinion, the contrary one will not always be admitted on the authority of its proper *evidence* only. We ſee every day that men are *ſilenced* without being *convinced*. They may ſee nothing to

object to a new ſet of principles, but they may juſtly ſuſpect that every conſideration neceſſary to form a right judgment in the caſe, may not be preſent to their minds, and think that when they ſhall have time to recollect themſelves, things may appear in a very different light, and therefore may ſuſpend their aſſent. Or, perceiving an utter inconſiſtency between the new opinion propoſed to them, and thoſe which they have hitherto held, and being perſuaded that they once ſaw ſufficient reaſon for what they have been accuſtomed to maintain, they may think themſelves excuſeable if, without taking the trouble to re-examine the ſubject, they content themſelves with their former ſentiments upon it. They may think that there muſt be ſome latent fallacy in the arguments for the new principle, though they are not able to detect it.

When we conſider propoſitions with their proofs as mere logicians, we are apt to think that nothing more is requiſite to ſecure a full aſſent to them, than a per-

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ception of the agreement of ideas; but in reality there are many other cauſes of aſſent beſides this; and ſome of the very ſtrongeſt with reſpect to the great bulk of mankind, are of a very different nature. In their minds there is ſuch an eſtabliſhed connexion between the ideas of *truth* and *right*, and thoſe of the opinions and practices of their parents, their countrymen, their party, their teachers, &c. (a connexion formed in the earlieſt years of infancy, and receiving additional ſtrength in every period of life) that it is not in the power of any thing that we call *evidence*, to ſeparate them. In this caſe, perſons who are not of an inquiſitive and ſpeculative turn, that is, the great maſs of mankind, will hardly ever liſten to any attempt to ſeparate them. What is more common than to hear the charge of hereſy, impiety, and blaſphemy, thundered out againſt particular opinions, by perſons who are ſo far from pretending to have examined them, that they will even declare they think it wrong to examine, or deliberate in the caſe; ſuch examination

mination and deliberation implying at leaſt a *doubt*, which they dread to entertain, even for a moment.

Beſides, we all know that a regard to eaſe, reputation, and intereſt, imperceptibly biaſſes the judgments of men; ſo that if it be for a man's eaſe, reputation, or intereſt, to maintain a particular opinion, how well diſpoſed ſoever he may be in other reſpects, he is not to be truſted with the diſcuſſion. He is no judge of his own impartiality; as the ſame arguments will appear to him in a very different light from what they would have done, if his eaſe, intereſt, reputation, &c. had been on the other ſide. The degree of this influence would not be ſuſpected, except by perſons who know mankind well, and who have attended to the hiſtory of controverſy. Can any proteſtant imagine, that there would ever have been ſo many ingenious defences of the doctrine of tranſubſtantiation, or that ſo many perſons would have really believed in it, if, beſides the influence of education and authority, it had not been part of a

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ſyſtem which it was inconvenient, diſreputable, or hazardous, to abandon? All unitarians muſt ſee the force of the ſame influences on the minds of thoſe who defend the doctrine of the trinity.

We ſee the effect of the ſame cauſes of error in civil life. For we ſhall certainly deceive ourſelves, and think too ill of mankind, if we ſhould imagine that they always act contrary to their judgment, when they aſſert and maintain what we moſt clearly ſee to be falſe. Their connexions and intereſts, &c. impoſe upon their judgments. When nations go to war, both ſides, I doubt not, in general, ſeriouſly think themſelves in the right. They think they are only returning injuries received, or preventing the effects of the moſt hoſtile intentions; and they read with indignation the manifeſtos of their adverſaries, which always breathe the ſpirit of peace.

Did every man, as an individual, really judge for himſelf, without the interference of any undue influence, we ſhould not ſee the ſame opinions and maxims prevail, as they

they generally do, in particular families, ſchools, and communities of any kind. Whenever great bodies of men, connected as they muſt be by intereſt, or ſome other equally ſtrong bond of union, profeſs the the ſame opinion, there can be no doubt but that their intereſt, or other principle of union, had a conſiderable influence in forming their judgments, and that had they not been under that influence, they would have thought as variouſly as any other equal number of men, who are not ſo connected.

'On account of ſome of theſe undue influences, by means of which the proper effect of evidence is precluded, we are not to expect that any arguments will have much weight with the generality of perſons who are far advanced in life. By one means or other they have, as we uſually ſay, *made up their minds*, and notwithſtanding all that can be propoſed to them, if they ſhould be prevailed upon to give any kind or degree of attention to a new opinion, they will frequently only remain the more confirmed in their former way of thinking. We may won-

der that reaſons which appear ſo clear and convincing to ourſelves, ſhould have no weight with others. But univerſal experience ſhews that, in many caſes, they have even leſs than none. For conſiderations which we think to make for us, they often think to make againſt us; and where *conduct* is concerned, the mildeſt expoſtulations will often only exaſperate; ſo that, inſtead of perſuading men to act as we wiſh them to do, we often leave them more obſtinate in their own way.

If any perſon doubt the truth of this obſervation, let him make the experiment himſelf, which it will not be difficult to do. If he be a chriſtian, let him propoſe a conference with a Jew; if he be a catholic, let him have an interview with a proteſtant; or if a proteſtant, with an old catholic; if he be a trinitarian, let him propoſe his arguments to an unitarian; if an unitarian, let him argue with a trinitarian; if a whig in this country, with an old tory; or if a tory, with a ſtaunch whig. I do not ſay that in ſuch conferences as theſe no man will ever gain his point; but it appears

pears to me, from the courſe of my obſervation, that if the parties be turned forty or fifty years of age, and if by reading, thinking, or converſation, they have been long ſettled in their opinions, it is not one caſe in a hundred in which any change of opinion will be produced by this means. There are many Jews, many catholics, many trinitarians, many Arians, many deiſts, and many atheiſts, on whom I am ſenſible that no arguments, or mode of addreſs, that I, as an *unitarian chriſtian*, could make uſe of, would have any effect whatever.

Let a man go into Spain and Portugal, and, if it were poſſible, even work miracles, to ſhew them that the proteſtant religion is true; if they were not more in number than thoſe which we have reaſon to think were wrought by the apoſtles; and if after a certain time they were diſcontinued, as thoſe of the apoſtles were, a great proportion of the inhabitants would probably, for a long time at leaſt, continue to think as they now do. How many perſons are there who would have no patience to hear

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ſuch preachers, or any thing that could be ſaid about them; and whatever reports they could not avoid hearing concerning their *miracles*, they would, without any examination, conclude them to be all tricks and impoſitions; and when theſe workers of miracles were gone off the ſtage, the converſion of this popiſh nation to the proteſtant religion, would probably proceed no faſter than that of the heathen world to chriſtianity.

How little diſpoſed ſome perſons of the beſt underſtanding may be to give any attention to thoſe who are of a party or profeſſion different from their own, we have a pretty remarkable example of in the late Dr. Johnſon, who was ſo bigotted a churchman, that when he was in Scotland, and would gladly have heard Dr. Robertſon preach, would not go into a church, though eſtabliſhed by law, becauſe it was a preſbyterian one. Suppoſing the principles of this deſpiſed preſbyterian church to have been ever ſo right and clear, can any perſon imagine it to have been poſſible for ſuch a man as Dr. Johnſon to have been

a convert to them? But the contempt with which the philoſophers, and men of learning among the Heathens, conſidered chriſtianity, probably far exceeded that which Dr. Johnſon entertained for the tenets or practices of the preſbyterians.

How little alſo is it that many of the learned clergy of the church of England know of the diſſenters, or their writings? Great numbers of them have no more knowledge of what is tranſacted in a conventicle, than in a pagoda, and would ſooner, I dare ſay, be perſuaded to enter the latter, than the former. By this we may judge of the reluctance with which the proud and learned gentiles would receive any propoſal to go into a chriſtian church, in the firſt, or even the ſecond century. Let the principles of any ſet of men, who are much deſpiſed, and little known, be ever ſo *true*, or *evident*, there can be no chance of their becoming generally prevalent, except in a long courſe of time. Let no perſon then wonder at the *time* which the great revolution effected by chriſtianity took up, and at the

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remains of heatheniſm in many villages, and remote parts of the world, which had but little intercourſe with ſtrangers. The change was *rapid*, conſidering all the circumſtances of the caſe, and what could never have been effected at all but by the force of truth.

Philoſophical truth ſeems to be better calculated to make its way in the world than truth of a religious nature, becauſe men are not ſo much intereſted in oppoſing it. But it muſt not be forgotten, that Galileo was put into the inquiſition for maintaining one of the firſt principles of modern philoſophy. The doctrine of Newton made but little progreſs abroad in the firſt half century after its publication in England, and at this very day it is not received (or has not been received till very lately) in *all* the foreign univerſities. Can any perſon attend to theſe facts (and many others of a ſimilar nature might be mentioned) and wonder that the gentile world was not ſooner converted to chriſtianity?

I am, Sir, &c.

LETTER X.

Of the different Foundations on which the Belief of Judaiſm or Chriſtianity, and that of other Religions ſtands.

DEAR SIR,

MANY perſons content themſelves with ſaying they have no occaſion to inquire into the origin of the Jewiſh or chriſtian religions. Mankind, they ſay, have always been credulous, and vulgar errors are innumerable. What could be more firmly believed than the fabulous hiſtories of Apollo, Diana, and the reſt of the Grecian and Roman divinities, by the Greeks and Romans, the ſtory of Mahomet's journey to heaven by the Mahometans, the tranſformation of Wiſhnou by the Indians, or the legendary tales of the church of Rome by the generality of the catholics? All theſe things are, or were, moſt firmly believed by whole nations, ſo that it would have

have been hazardous for any perſon to intimate the leaſt doubt with reſpect to them; and yet what man of ſenſe will ſay that they even deſerve any examination? Why then may not this be the caſe with the the Jewiſh and chriſtian religions?

But thoſe who ſatisfy themſelves with this light manner of treating the ſubject, have not ſufficiently conſidered the eſſential difference between the circumſtances of a mere *tradition*, and thoſe of a *hiſtory written at the time*, not to mention other circumſtances of the greateſt importance in the caſe; and therefore, though I have mentioned this difference in my introductory letters, I ſhall enter into a fuller diſcuſſion of it here, with an application to the caſe in hand.

We know that when any thing is told from one perſon to another, it never fails to be altered; and if it be of an extraordinary nature (ſuch as moſt perſons take great pleaſure in telling and hearing) it will be enlarged in almoſt every hand through which it paſſes, ſo that in a ſhort time the origi-

nal relater ſhall not know the ſtory that he himſelf firſt told; and it is often impoſſible to trace the riſe and progreſs of reports, which in length of time gain the greateſt credit. Of this we have frequent examples, eſpecially in time of war, and public diſturbances of any kind; ſo that wiſe men pay little regard to the belief of the multitude in things of this nature, eſpecially if no perſons have been intereſted to enquire into the origin of the reports, and to detect the errors that might be in them. In theſe very circumſtances are the ſtories in the heathen mythology, the popiſh legends, &c. ſo that they might gain great credit, and in time get recorded in writing, without any foundation in truth. But in all theſe caſes it will be eaſy to aſcertain whether the hiſtory was committed to writing by an eye witneſs, and whether it was propagated and recorded by unprejudiced perſons.

The caſe of a hiſtory written at the time of any tranſactions, or ſo near to it, that the memory of them was freſh in the minds of

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thoſe into whoſe hands the accounts came, and eſpecially the hiſtory of ſuch things as no perſon was previouſly diſpoſed to believe, and ſuch as would not be admitted without enquiring into their truth, is eſſentially different from that of a mere tradition, which it was no body's intereſt to reject. And ſuch was the hiſtory of the tranſactions on which the truth of the Jewiſh and chriſtian religion depends. The former is contained in the books of Moſes, recited by himſelf, in the hearing of all the people for whoſe uſe they were written, and the latter in the goſpels and the book of Acts, probably all written by eye witneſſes of the facts recorded in them, and received without objection by eye-witneſſes; and it can never be ſaid that either the religion of Moſes, or that of Jeſus, was ſuch as the people to whom they were delivered, were at all prediſpoſed to receive, or to reliſh.

Neither of theſe hiſtories ſtole upon the world inſenſibly, ſo that it might be ſaid that a ſmall matter might grow to a great

magnitude before it was committed to writing, and that then it was too late to examine into its truth. On the contrary, the accounts were published while the events were fresh in the memory of those into whose hands the books came, and who would never have given their sanction to them, but have immediately rejected them, as fabulous, if they had not known them to be true; so that their credit must have been blasted at once, and they would never have been transmitted to posterity as authentic narratives of facts. This will be more evident if it be considered how deeply interested were both those who embraced, and those who rejected the doctrines of these books, to examine into their authenticity.

Where neither life, property, nor reputation are concerned, accounts of transactions may get into the world without much examination. But this was not the case with respect to the history of Moses, or that of Christ, especially the latter. Every man who embraced christianity, considered himself

ſelf as bound to maintain the truth of it at the hazard of his life, and of every thing dear to him. And ſurely thoſe who died a violent death for their adherence to chriſtianity (which was the caſe with moſt of the apoſtles, and many other primitive chriſtians, themſelves witneſſes of the miracles and reſurrection of Chriſt) would not have done it but upon grounds that to them appeared ſufficient. They muſt certainly have been fully perſuaded that the cauſe in which they ſuffered ſo much, and ſo long, was a good one; and, living at the time, they had the beſt opportunity of knowing it.

This argument will apply to the martyrs of the next and following ages. And it is remarkable that the perſecution continued as long as an enquiry into the truth of the facts was tolerably eaſy, viz. about three hundred years, after which time the value of martyrdom, conſidered as an evidence of the truth of the facts, would be much diminiſhed; but during this period, the evidence they afforded was in ſome views acquiring additional ſtrength. For, if the firſt ſet of martyrs, thoſe who

were

were our Saviour's cotemporaries, could be ſuppoſed to have been under a kind of *infatuation*, and have ſacrificed their lives without ſufficient reaſon, thoſe of the next generation had ſufficient time to recollect themſelves, and would hardly have followed them in the ſame courſe, without examination; and they ſtill had ſufficient opportunity for the purpoſe. The goſpels were then recent publications, and it might eaſily have been enquired, in the very ſcene of the tranſactions, whether the things had been as they were related or not.

If even the ſecond generation ſhould have been blinded to their deſtruction, which is beyond meaſure improbable, the third was not wholly deſtitute of the means of enquiry, and they would certainly have availed themſelves of it, rather than have ſuffered what we know they did in the cauſe of chriſtianity. In this manner, ſucceſſive generations of martyrs bore their teſtimony to the truth of thoſe facts, for their faith in which they ſuffered, till no reaſonable doubt could remain but that, if the hiſtory of the goſpels

and of the book of Acts, had not been in the main authentic, the falſehood would have been detected.

On the other hand, as the martyrs for chriſtianity were deeply intereſted to enquire into the truth of that for which they ſuffered, their enemies, who were as much exaſperated as men could be at the progreſs of chriſtianity, had motives ſufficient to detect and expoſe the impoſture of it, if it had been in their power. The umbrage that was taken at chriſtianity in Judea, the ſcene of the tranſactions, began with itſelf. Chriſt himſelf was never without the moſt bitter enemies. The ſame was the caſe with the apoſtles; and certainly they who impriſoned them, and *charged them to preach no more in that name*, Acts iv. 17. would have expoſed their artifices, and pretended miracles, if it had been in their power; and they wanted no opportunity for the purpoſe, having every thing in the country at their command.

In theſe remarkable circumſtances chriſtianity was preached, and its profeſſors were perſecuted in Judea itſelf for the ſpace of

forty

forty years, without its being pretended that the moſt watchful eye had diſcovered any impoſture in the caſe. The activity of Paul, while he was a perſecutor, was only employed in *haling men and women, and committing them to priſon*, Acts viii. 3. and *perſecuting them into ſtrange cities*. He himſelf was afterwards a priſoner for his profeſſion of chriſtianity, two years in Judea, where forty men entered into a bond *that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed him*, Acts xxiii. 12. but nothing is ſaid of their attempt to find out his artifices to deceive the people; though this, as they could not but know, would have anſwered their purpoſe infinitely better than killing him.

Another theatre of chriſtian miracles was in gentile countries, where the preachers of chriſtianity had always adverſaries, as well as friends. But here alſo we hear of no detection of their frauds; even though every other method was taken to prevent the ſpread of chriſtianity. In the time of Julian, no writings, or records of any kind,

had been deſtroyed; and if *he* could have diſcovered any thing reſpecting the origin or propagation of chriſtianity, that would have been to its prejudice, would he have ſpared any pains to bring it to light? He had evidently no hopes of being able to do any thing of the kind, and therefore, he attacked chriſtianity in other ways.

Similar obſervations may be applied to the hiſtory of the Jewiſh religion. All the articles of it were formed at once, and committed to writing by Moſes himſelf; and the books were not kept ſecret, but expreſs orders were given, and proviſion was made, for frequent copies to be taken of them. Nothing eſſential to this religion reſts upon tradition. If any alteration or innovation had been attempted, it might eaſily have been detected, and no fraud in the eſtabliſhment of it could poſſibly have been concealed. The body of the people, to whom this law was given, frequently rebelled againſt Moſes, and would even have gone back to Egypt. Aaron, Moſes's own brother, and Miriam, his ſiſter, who could not have been out of the ſecret of any of the

means

means of deceiving the multitude, that he might have employed, took umbrage at his preheminence, and therefore wanted no motive to detect any impoſition they knew him to have been guilty of.

Though there were not, properly ſpeaking, any martyrs to the Jewiſh religion in that early period, the inſtitutions themſelves were many of them ſo burdenſome, eſpecially that of circumciſion, and others of them ſo hazardous, as thoſe of the ſabbath, the ſabbatical year, &c. and all of them ſo contrary to the rites to which the people had been accuſtomed, and for which they had contracted a fondneſs, which they never wholly loſt, that they muſt have been ſufficiently diſpoſed, in every period of their hiſtory, to detect any impoſition they could have found in it. Their own idolatrous kings, and the prieſts of Baal, would, no doubt, have been glad to have juſtified their deſertion of the religion of Moſes, by the diſcovery of any thing that would have been to its prejudice. They were with reſpect to Judaiſm, what Julian was with reſpect to chriſtianity.

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When theſe things are conſidered, how can it be ſaid that, the caſe of the Jewiſh and chriſtian religions bear any reſemblance to the fabulous mythology of the Greeks and Romans, the metamorphoſes of the Indian Wiſhnou, the journey of Mahomet to heaven, or the legendary tales of the church of Rome; all of which are founded on mere tradition, none of the pretended facts having been committed to writing at the time, and all of them received by thoſe who ſuffered nothing for their faith in them, who were previouſly diſpoſed to receive them, and add to them; and when no unbelievers had any opportunity of examining into the truth of them; and when there do not appear to have been any perſons like the perſecutors of chriſtians intereſted to expoſe their falſehood. Nothing, therefore, can be leſs entitled to credit than theſe ſtories, and nothing more worthy of it, than thoſe Jewiſh and chriſtian hiſtories, to which they have moſt injudiciouſly been compared.

I am,

Yours, &c.

LETTER XI.

The Evidence of Judaiſm and Chriſtianity compared with that of Mahometaniſm, and of the Religion of Indoſtan.

DEAR SIR,

SOME have compared the riſe and progreſs of chriſtianity to that of Mahometaniſm, and that of Judaiſm to that of the religion of Indoſtan. But they certainly never attended to ſeveral very remarkable differences in both the caſes.

1. There is no fact, of an hiſtorical nature, on which the truth of the Mahometan religion is ſaid to be founded, that could be ſubjected to examination; becauſe all the miracle that Mahomet himſelf pretended to was the revelation of the Koran, made to himſelf only. However, any perſon may judge at this day whether the compoſition of it be ſuch, as that human ability

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(that of Mahomet himſelf, for inſtance, aſſiſted by ſome confidential friend) could not have been equal to it. Let any man of ſenſe now read the Koran, and give his opinion on the ſubject.

2. Mahometaniſm never did gain any converts in conſequence of an examination into the grounds of it, among perſons not intereſted in the reception of it. In what country was this religion ever generally received, in which the ruling powers oppoſed it, and perſecuted it, or in which the ruling powers were not previouſly Mahometans?

The firſt Mahometans were all native Arabs, who were univerſally gainers by the propagation of their religion. But though they conquered many countries, their religion never became that of the generality of the ancient inhabitants, if they had been chriſtians before. Notwithſtanding all the hardſhips to which they ſubjected thoſe of that religion, and eſpecially the contempt with which they treat them, all the countries of the Eaſt are ſtill full of chriſtians, of various denominations. The far greater part of

Aſia Minor, where the Turks were long ſettled before they invaded Europe, and alſo the greateſt part of Turkey in Europe, of which they have been poſſeſſed three hundred years, is chriſtian, Conſtantinople itſelf at leaſt half ſo. The greateſt part of Spain was once in the poſſeſſion of Mahometans, and ſome parts of it near eight hundred years; but we read of few or no Mahometans in it beſide native Moors from Africa.

In Indoſtan the governors only are Mahometans, though it is three hundred years ſince they conquered the country, ſo that whenever the government ſhall ceaſe to be Mahometan, the profeſſion of that religion in it will ceaſe of courſe.

That many perſons have, in a courſe of time, become firm believers in Mahometaniſm, cannot be doubted; and, therefore, many will probably continue ſo, eſpecially in Turkey and Arabia, though the government of theſe countries ſhould become chriſtian. But we may ſafely prophecy that, whenever the government ſhall be changed,

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a death blow, a blow from which it will never recover, will be given to that religion, and all the remains of it will vaniſh in due time.

The Tartars, who at length conquered the Saracens, and put an end to the Caliphate, adopted their religion in preference to heatheniſm; but it by no means appears to have been done upon an enquiry into the hiſtorical evidence of it. Thoſe Tartars who firſt conformed to the Mahometan religion, were thoſe who had ſerved under the Mahometan princes. They acquired power and influence by degrees, and many of them, no doubt, thought it neceſſary to make profeſſion of that religion in order to eſtabliſh themſelves the better among a people who would not have any other. Thus Mahometaniſm, from being the religion of the *chiefs* among the Tartars, became in time that of the common people, and was afterwards adopted by other tribes of Tartars. If in any manner ſimilar to this, or in any other in which the firſt converts were *princes*, the chriſtian religion came to be profeſſed by any of the northern nations

of Europe, I would lay no ſtreſs on ſuch converſions as a proof of the truth of chriſtianity, or as any recommendation of it.

3. There never has been any period in which the merits and evidence of the Mahometan and chriſtian religions were freely debated by learned men. In all Mahometan countries it is death to make a proſelyte, or to conceal one. Let this important circumſtance be changed, and let a free intercourſe be opened between Mahometans and rational, that is, unitarian chriſtians, and I ſhall have no doubt with reſpect to the conſequence.

4. Mahomet began with converting his own family, in which he met with difficulty, though they were intereſted in his ſucceſs, and afterwards his neareſt relations derived the greateſt advantage from the ſcheme. On the contrary, Chriſt does not appear to have addreſſed himſelf prrticularly either to his own family, or to the ruling powers of the country, and no perſon connected with him ever derived any advantage from his undertaking. Two of his brothers were

were apoſtles, but they died martyrs, as well as moſt of the other apoſtles. The poſterity of Moſes derived no advantage from their relation to him, but continued in the rank of common Levites. None of Mahomet's firſt followers died voluntary martyrs to their faith in his divine miſſion. To riſk one's life in battle with the hope of victory, is a very different thing from calmly ſubmitting to a cruel death, without any hope but in a future life.

5. That the divine miſſion of Mahomet was firmly believed, and pretty early too, may be accounted for without ſuppoſing it to be true. His own family and acquaintance might be taken by his auſterities and confident aſſertions, and the ſucceſs of his enterprize would ſoon give them a notion that he had the countenance of heaven. His enthuſiaſm would paſs for inſpiration, and at length he might even himſelf imagine that a particular providence attended him. But had Mahomet died in

battle, and consequently all the effects of his *arms* had ceased, where would have been his religion?

The religion of Christ was propagated in very different circumstances. No man having pretensions to a divine mission, could have died in circumstances more unfavourable to the credit of it than he did; and yet his religion gained ground, and notwithstanding every mode of opposition, is firmly believed, in all revolutions of empires, by those who derive no worldly advantage from the profession of it to this day.

It should also be considered, that what is most reputable in the religion of Mahomet, is derived from the Jewish and christian religions, the corruptions of which he began with undertaking to reform; and he had a particular advantage in addressing the Arabs, as the descendants of Abraham. His doctrine of the *divine unity*, gave him great advantage over the generality of christians of that age, who had most miserably bewildered themselves

themſelves with their notions of a trinity in the godhead, of which it was impoſſible that they ſhould give any rational account.

It has been ſaid that *the religion of Indoſtan* is contained in written books, as well as that of Moſes, and may be of as great, or greater, antiquity, and that the belief of the people in it is no leſs firm than that of Jews, or chriſtians, in theirs. But I beg leave to make the following obſervations on the ſubject.

1. The books which contain this religion are not, as far as appears, of an hiſtorical nature, giving an account of miracles wrought in proof of the divine miſſion of thoſe who wrote them, or who publiſhed the religion contained in them, but conſiſts only of doctrines concerning God, the creation, the deſtination of the human race, &c. and in themſelves utterly irrational, ſo that every thing the books contain might have been compoſed without any ſupernatural aſſiſtance. And there is nothing that we can now examine by the rules of hiſtory and teſtimony. Conſe-

quently the Veda's cannot be brought into compariſon with the books of Moſes, the goſpels, and the book of Acts.

2. The age of the books is very uncertain, as there has not yet been diſcovered any authentic hiſtory of the country, giving an account of the authors of thoſe books, and continuing the hiſtory from that time to the preſent, which is the caſe with the books of Moſes.

3. The religious books of the Hindoos are confined to one claſs of people in the country, who ſupport their rank and privileges by keeping the common people in ignorance of them. It is even death by the laws of the country, for perſons of a lower caſt to read thoſe books, or to hear them read by another perſon, which is certainly a very ſuſpicious circumſtance. And though, by this means, thoſe of the inferior caſts are kept in ſubjection to their ſuperiors, they are all taught to believe that they are of a higher rank, and greater favourites of heaven, than the reſt of mankind; that they will be rewarded for their adherence to

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their religion, and punished for deserting it. It has never been said that the faith of the lower people is the result of *inquiry*, and conviction, nor do the Indians attempt to convert other people.

4. The professors of this religion never suffered any persecution for it; at least not in times in which the evidence of it was open to examination, as was the case with christianity. Their faith, therefore, is only like that of the Greeks and Romans, in their religions; a faith founded on mere tradition, and having the sanction of dark antiquity. Let the Hindoos, as well as the Mahometans, become acquainted with our literature, and have free intercourse with unitarian christians, and I have no doubt but that the result will be in favour of christianity.

I am, Sir,

Yours, &c.

LETTER XII.

Of the Nature of Idolatry, and the Attachment of the Heathens to it, as a principal Cauſe of their hatred of Chriſtians.

DEAR SIR,

YOU acknowledge that caſes may be ſuppoſed, in which the moſt ſufficient evidence would not produce its natural effect on the minds of men, that numbers might remain unconvinced, in circumſtances in which we think that we ourſelves could not heſitate to declare ourſelves converts to an opinion. You are ſenſible that, in caſes of this nature, we either do not ſufficiently conſider the difference between the previous ſtate of our minds and that of theirs, or that we do not place ourſelves preciſely in the ſame circumſtances; and that, on theſe accounts, it muſt be impoſſible to argue juſtly from the perſuaſion

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or feelings of any one man to thoſe of any other. But you wiſh to know more particularly than I have hitherto explained it, what was the actual ſtate of the gentile world in general with reſpect to chriſtianity, eſpecially in what manner it appears to have been treated by thoſe who did not receive, but continued to oppoſe it; and what kind of objections were in thoſe early ages made to it.

As this is a very reaſonable requeſt, I ſhall give you all the ſatisfaction in my power with reſpect to it; and I am confident that a juſt exhibition of thoſe ancient times will convince you, that the oppoſition which chriſtianity then met with, can ſupply no valid argument againſt it at this day. The objections which were then made to chriſtianity were of ſuch a nature, that they can have no weight with any modern unbelievers; ſo that if it had been poſſible for any perſon in thoſe times to have enjoyed the ſuperior light of the preſent age, he muſt have been aſhamed of almoſt every thing which was alleged againſt the

the gospel by the ancient opposers of it. Indeed, so very absurd were the notions of the heathens, philosophers as well as others, that it is even difficult for us at this day to suppose they could ever have existed, at least so generally, as universal history shews that they did. On this account, though I might content myself with shewing the *fact*, I shall descant a little on the causes of it.

So little connexion do we see, or can imagine, between the religious ceremonies of the Greeks and Romans (such as sacrifices, processions, games, &c.) and the *welfare of a state*, that we can hardly bring ourselves to believe that any men of sense could ever have entertained the idea. Yet nothing was so deeply fixed in the minds of the gentile world in general.

The whole system of false religion, or idolatry, arose from the notion of a connexion between good or bad fortune, and certain acts, or *ceremonies*, which, for some reason or other, were supposed to gain the favour or incur the displeasure of those di-

vinities which had the diſpenſation of good or evil in the world.

In the infant ſtate of the world, when the *true* cauſes of things were not known, it is not to be wondered at that men ſhould fix upon *wrong* ones; for they are never eaſy without imagining ſome hypotheſis for every phenomenon. And ſince the beſt concerted plans were often unſucceſsful, for reaſons which the wiſeſt men could not foreſee or comprehend, they concluded that beſides thoſe cauſes of the events of life, which might be traced to the power and policy of men, there muſt be other and inviſible ones, and ſuch as were independent of the regular operation of the laws of nature. We may ſee the ſame propenſity among ignorant people at this day. For *ſuperſtition* is always in proportion to *ignorance*. But whereas the ignorance and ſuperſtition of the preſent day have no reſource but in a blind *fate*, or capricious *fortune*, reſiding in they know not what; mankind in the early ages fixed upon the great

great viſible objects in nature, ſuch as the ſun, moon, and ſtars.

Being ſenſible of their power in ſome reſpects, mankind eaſily imagined that it extended to other things; and this influence not being ſubject to any known regular laws, ſo that events might be predicted, or guarded againſt, they concluded that their power was not a *neceſſary influence*, but a *voluntary agency*. Then concluding, that there muſt be a ſentient and intelligent principle in the heavenly bodies, they might eaſily go on to imagine, that there was a ſimilar ſentient principle in the earth, and even in the ſeparate parts of it, as ſeas, rivers, mountains, &c. alſo in animals, and eſpecially in man, whoſe paſſions and affections they could not explain by what was viſible in his frame. This inviſible principle they would eaſily ſuppoſe to be, like that in the heavenly bodies, incorruptible and immortal.

In this train of thinking mankind were ſoon provided with a prodigious number of inviſible

inviſible beings, whoſe favour it behoved them to court, and whoſe diſpleaſure they had to avoid. And proſperous or adverſe events having actually followed certain actions, they would naturally imagine that the ſame actions, or others ſimilar to them, had an influence with the beings who had the power over thoſe events.

This mental proceſs was not peculiar to ancient times. We ſee the ſame thing in the practice of many gameſters now, who will even imagine that good or bad fortune depends upon a particular place at the table, and that it may be changed by turning round their chair, &c. and when once any opinion, though of this moſt ridiculous kind, has got the ſanction of *general belief*, on however inſufficient grounds, it is not eaſily eradicated. For if the expected event do not follow the uſual circumſtances, the blame will be laid on a thouſand unperceived cauſes, rather than it will be ſuppoſed that thoſe circumſtances had no real tendency to produce the deſired effect. Conſequently the ſame things will

will continue to be practiſed with the ſame expectations, and a ſingle coincidence of the uſual preliminary preparations with the expected event will be talked of, and magnified, while numberleſs failures will be forgotten, or accounted for. And the longer any ſuperſtitious rite had been practiſed, the more would its efficacy be depended upon, and the leſs regard would be paid to the caſes in which it had failed.

From ſuch cauſes as theſe, it cannot be denied that, in the age of Chriſt and the apoſtles, the religious cuſtoms of the heathen world had got the firmeſt hold on the minds of men. No perſon was able to trace the origin of any rite of importance; ſo that the veneration beſtowed on every thing that was *ancient* was attached to them; and it was taken for granted, that the well being of all ſtates abſolutely depended upon the obſervance of the religious rites which had been from time immemorial practiſed in them.

Hence every perſon who ſuggeſted an idea of the inſignificance of ſuch things,

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and much more one who proteſted againſt them, was conſidered as a dangerous member of ſociety, and treated as an *atheiſt*; becauſe he was an enemy to ſuch gods as his fellow-citizens acknowledged, and promoted the diſcontinuance of thoſe rites on which, in their opinion, the ſafety of the commonwealth depended.

On theſe principles, and without any farther enquiry, ſuch a perſon was thought unworthy of protection, or of life. Conſequently chriſtians, as diſſenters from the eſtabliſhed worſhip, were hated, ſo that the very *name* was ſufficient to condemn them, and the moſt patriotic magiſtrates thought it their duty to exterminate them. Such was the prejudice againſt chriſtianity on this account only, that it was thought unneceſſary to enquire into the ground of their faith; and perſons of the moſt excellent characters in other reſpects, and of the moſt cultivated minds, ſuch as Trajan, Pliny, and Marcus Aurelius, made no ſcruple to condemn to death, and even to torture, all who only acknowledged themſelves to be chriſtians.

It was, however, the belief of all the ancient heathens, that different kinds of worſhip were proper for different people. Indeed, they could not but ſee that different nations had been proſperous, notwithſtanding their different religions; and therefore the greateſt conquerors tolerated the nations that were ſubject to their empire in their peculiar rites. On this principle the Jews had obtained a toleration for themſelves, wherever they were diſperſed through the Roman empire; and, under the idea that chriſtianity was a ſect among the Jews, this was alſo for a long time tolerated by the Romans. But as ſoon as, by the increaſe of proſelytes, the nature of chriſtianity began to be perceived, and the national religion was apprehended to be in danger from it, the moſt violent meaſures were taken to exterminate it. The ſame, no doubt, would have been the caſe with judaiſm, if the progreſs of it had been equally alarming.

We perceive the extreme veneration for the ancient cuſtoms of nations, and the offence that was taken at chriſtianity, as a

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novel religion, upon all occaſions. Celſus upbraids the Jewiſh chriſtians with deſerting the law of their country *. "The "Jews," he ſays, "have a law of their "own, and do right to obſerve it, becauſe "different laws have been framed by dif-"ferent people, and it is fit that thoſe "things ſhould be obſerved which have "been eſtabliſhed by public authority †." Julian alſo thought more favourably of the Jews than of the chriſtians, becauſe the former had ſacrifices, and prieſts, &c. in common with the gentiles ‡. This was a popular argument againſt chriſtians, their cuſtoms being peculiar to themſelves, and different from thoſe of all other people.

The ancient religions being eſtabliſhed by the laws of the countries in which they were obſerved, chriſtianity was conſidered as an *illegal* thing, and the aſſemblies of chriſtians not being *authorized by law*, all thoſe who frequented them were conſi-

* Lardner's Teſtimonies, vol. 2. p. 321.

† Ibid. vol. 2. p. 325. ‡ Ibid. vol. 4. p. 87.

dered as liable to puniſhment on that account only; and *aſſembling in ſecret* was always thought dangerous in well regulated ſtates. Celſus objects to chriſtians their holding ſecret aſſemblies, contrary to law *.

On this account, chriſtians, not denying, but avowing, theſe practices, were conſidered as obnoxious to the law. Among others Athenagoras complains that chriſtians were perſecuted for the name only †; and when a man was thought well of on other accounts, it was an objection to him that he was a chriſtian. According to Tertullian, it was uſual with them to ſay, ſuch a one is a good man, but he is a chriſtian ‡.

That the heathens really believed that the welfare of the ſtate depended upon the obſervance of their ancient religious ceremonies, and that public calamities were occaſioned by the omiſſion of them, there is the moſt abundant evidence. I ſhall only mention a few of the proofs, ſuch as will

* Lardner's Teſtimonies, vol. 2. p. 322.

† Ibid. vol. 2. p. 185. ‡ Ibid. vol. 2. p. 389.

ſhew

ſhew that not the vulgar only, but the moſt enlightened of the heathens, and perſons in the higheſt authority, held the ſame opinion, and that they conſidered chriſtians as the cauſe of all the calamities of the empire. Maximin, in one of his reſcripts, ſpeaking of the hurricanes and earthquakes of thoſe times, ſays, "there is no man who does not "know that all theſe, and worſe calamities, "have heretofore often happened, and that "they have befallen us becauſe of the per-"nicious error and empty vanity of theſe "execrable men, which has ſo ſpread, as to "cover almoſt the whole earth with ſhame "and diſhonour*". Porphyry, a philoſopher, who wrote againſt chriſtianity, ſaid, "ſince Jeſus has been honoured, none has "received any public benefit from the "Gods†".

When ſome of the ſenators petitioned the emperors Valentinian, Theodoſius, and Arcadius, to replace the altar of victory which had been taken from the door of the ſenate-

* Ibid. vol. 3. p. 307. † Ibid. vol. 3. p. 184.

houſe, they ſaid, in the perſon of Rome, "This way of worſhip has brought all the "world into obedience to my laws. Theſe "rites drove Hanibal from my walls, and "the Gauls from the capitol *." It was more particularly imagined that the public welfare depended upon the veſtal virgins †.

Zozimus, a heathen hiſtorian, ſays, that "from the time of the public ſacrifices "ceaſing, and all other things received "from ancient tradition being neglected, "the Roman empire has gradually declined "till it has become the habitation of barba-"rians ‡, &c." Alſo, ſpeaking of the proſperity of the empire, during the obſervance of the ſecular games, he ſays, "in the third "conſulſhip of Conſtantine and Licinus, "the term of an hundred and ten years was "compleated, when the feſtival ought to "have been obſerved according to cuſtom; "but not having been then obſerved, there "was a neceſſity that affairs ſhould ſink into

* Lardner's Teſtimonies, vol. 4. p. 381.

† Ibid. vol. 4. p. 383. ‡ Ibid. vol. 4. p. 263.

"the

" the diſtreſs and miſery in which they " now are*."

Libanius, a diſtinguiſhed heathen philoſopher of the fourth century, ſpeaking of the ſacrifices which were then permitted at Rome, but ſuppreſſed in other places, ſays, " if in the ſacrifices there performed conſiſts " the ſtability of the empire" (which he took for granted) " it ought to be reckoned " beneficial to ſacrifice every where †." Again, " neither," ſays he, " is it at Rome " only that the liberty of ſacrificing re- " mains, but alſo in the city of Serapis, " that great and populous city" (meaning Alexandria) " which has a multitude of " temples, by which it renders the plenty " of Egypt common to all men. This " plenty is the work of the Nile. The city, " therefore, celebrates the Nile, and per- " ſuades him to riſe, and overflow the fields. " If theſe rites were not performed, when " and by whom they ought, he would not " do ſo, which they themſelves ſeem to be

* Ibid. vol. 4. p. 241. † Ibid. vol. 4. p. 148.

"ſenſible of, who willingly aboliſh ſuch "things, but do not aboliſh theſe, but "permit the river to enjoy his ancient "rights, for the ſake of the benefit he "affords *." The temple and ſtatue of Serapis being at length demoliſhed, it was given out by the heathens, that the Nile would no longer flow. Nevertheleſs, it roſe the next year to its uſual height †.

When Rhadagaiſus, a Goth, invaded the Roman empire, the Pagans gave out that they could not withſtand ſuch an enemy, who had the aſſiſtance of the gods, to whom he ſacrificed every day; whereas *they* had no help, ſince their gods and their rites were baniſhed. The chriſtian religion, they ſaid, had quite ruined the ſtate, and brought them into that miſerable condition. This barbarian, however, was conquered, and in a moſt complete manner. Afterwards Rome did fall into the hands of an enemy, but he was a chriſtian, and the Romans found him to be a merciful conqueror ‡. Not-

* Lardner's Teſtimonies, vol. 4. p. 149.

† Ibid. vol. 4. p. 409. ‡ Ibid. vol. 4. p. 428.

withſtanding all this, the Pagans ſtill attributed all the misfortunes of the empire to the progreſs of chriſtianity; and in anſwer to this, Auſtin wrote his famous book *De Civitate Dei*.

In conſequence of the heathens aſcribing all proſperous events to the favour of their gods, they conſidered temporal proſperity as a proof of their power, and therefore naturally concluded that religion to be a bad one, which expoſed its votaries to temporal evils. Hence Celſus objects to chriſtians their not being delivered by Chriſt when they were condemned to death *. Hence, alſo, aroſe part of the prejudice againſt Chriſt himſelf, viz. his being *put to death*, independent of the mode of his death, which marked him to be a low and mean character. Celſus, in particular, did not fail to object to chriſtians the miſerable death of Chriſt †.

Many of the heathens, inſtead of admiring the courage of the chriſtian martyrs, as dying in the cauſe of truth, reproached them for their folly and obſtinacy on that account.

* Ibid. vol. 2. p. 323. † Ibid. vol. 2. p. 317.

Porphyry,

Porphyry, alluding to chriſtians, ſpeaks of them as "mean people, who having em-"braced rules different from their former "way of life, would endure to be torn limb "from limb, rather than return to their old "courſe*." Tertullian ſhews how inconſiſtently the heathens reaſoned on this ſubject, who could allow that to die for one's country was honourable, but could think that to die for God and truth was reproachful and diſhonourable†.

It is obvious to remark, with Lardner, on this occaſion, that certainly men who were ſo much deſpiſed and hated, and who were expoſed to ſo much miſery in conſequence of being chriſtians, muſt have thought that they had good reaſons for becoming ſuch; and ſince many of them were men of good underſtanding in other reſpects, they would, no doubt, take proper pains to enquire into the ground of that faith to which they ſacrificed ſo much.

I am, Sir, &c.

* Lardner's Teſtimonies, vol. 3. p. 102.

† Ibid. vol. 2. p. 176.

LETTER XIII.

The Attachment of the Heathens to their Religion more particularly proved.

DEAR SIR,

ABSURD as the heathen religion was, there is the moſt indiſputable evidence of ſeveral of the wiſeſt of the heathens, long after the time of our Saviour, being the moſt firmly attached to it, and eſpecially of their practiſing the rites of *divination* preſcribed by it, whenever they wiſhed to pry into futurity. This was always a great article in the heathen religions; and the promiſes they held out of giving men information of this kind was, in all ages, one of the greateſt inducements to follow them. Nor ſhall we wonder at this, when we conſider how many perſons, of whoſe good ſenſe in other reſpects, better things might be expect-

ed, do even now ſecretly liſten to the idle tales of the loweſt fortune-tellers, and what numbers never fail to flock to any perſon who gives out the moſt abſurd public advertiſement for this purpoſe. In all theſe things the philoſophers of antiquity, who might have been expected to know better, did little or nothing, as Lardner obſerves, to improve the ſentiments of mankind; but, on the the contrary, they confirmed the prejudices of the common people, and made them ſtill worſe than they otherwiſe would have been*.

Philoſophers gave credit to all the Pythagorean fables †, and in particular entertained the moſt ridiculous idea of *inſpiration*, and of an intercourſe between the gods and men. This ſuperſtition and credulity, Dr. Lardner apprehends to have been the common diſpoſition of the heathen people, of all ranks, high and low, learned and unlearned ‡. It does not appear, he obſerves, that Pliny,

* Lardner's Teſtimonies, vol. 3. p. 276.

† Ibid. vol. 3. p. 275. ‡ Ibid. vol. 4. p. 235.

or

or Tacitus, entertained any doubt about the ancient worſhip, or ever enquired into the truth of chriſtianity *.

Pliny was an augur, and greatly valued the office. Every Roman emperor was *Pontifex maximus*. Marcus Aurelius was introduced into the college of prieſts called *Salii*, at the age of eight years, and was complete maſter of all the rules of the order, ſo as to be able to diſcharge, himſelf, the functions of that prieſthood. It is probable, therefore, that he gained in his childhood a deep tincture of ſuperſtition, which grew up with him, and was retained by him afterwards. He was indeed, extremely ſuperſtitious, and a rigid perſecutor; and he diſliked the chriſtians becauſe they outdid the Stoics in bearing pain and death †.

Julian, another philoſophical emperor, was ſo ſuperſtitious, that it was commonly ſaid, that if he returned victorious from the Perſian expedition, the race of bulls would be extirpated by his ſacrifices; and the

* Ibid. vol. 2. p. 67. † Ibid. vol. 2. p. 169.

multitude

multitude of them was ſo great, that his ſoldiers were often diſordered by their exceſs in eating and drinking at them *. On a feſtival to the honour of Venus, he walked in the proceſſion with lewd women, and others of the worſt of characters, followed by his horſe and guards †. Sacrificing on ſome occaſion to Mars, and the omens not being favourable, he called Jupiter to witneſs, that he would never more offer a ſacrifice to Mars ‡.

That the doctrine of *demons*, and of their intercourſe with men, and alſo that of the gods in general, and the notion of *inſpiration* by them, really obtained among the heathens, long after the promulgation of chriſtianity, abſurd as all modern philoſophers will think them to be, there is the moſt abundant evidence. Damaſcius wrote that, "the wife of Hierocles became poſ-"ſeſſed, and as the demon would not be "perſuaded to depart by good words, his

* Lardner's Teſtimonies, vol. 4. p. 26.

† Ibid. vol. 4. p. 32. ‡ Ibid. vol. 4. p. 27.

"diſciple

" diſciple Theoſebius compelled him by an " oath, though he did not underſtand ma- " gic, or theurgy; but he adjured him by " the rays of the ſun, and the god of the " Hebrews; whereupon the demon de- " parted, crying out, that he reverenced " the gods, and him in particular *." This, adds Dr. Lardner, is a ſtory of a gentile philoſopher, told by a gentile hiſtorian.

Marinus, ſpeaking of Proclus, ſays, " how " dear he was to the goddeſs, the preſident " of philoſophy" (meaning Minerva) " ap- " peared from the great progreſs that he " made in that ſtudy, to which he had " been directed by the goddeſs herſelf †." Among other ſuperſtitions of this Proclus, Marinus ſays, that once a month he puri- fied himſelf, according to the rites of the mother of the gods ‡. Of Ardeſius, Eu- napius ſays, " that he became little inferior " to his maſter Jamblichus, ſetting aſide

* Ibid. vol. 4. p. 284. † Ibid. vol. 4. p. 291.

‡ Ibid. vol. 4. p. 293.

" the

" the inſpiration which belonged to Jam-
" blichus *."

As it was imagined that the gods had the knowledge of future events, and often communicated it to men in their oracles, and by other modes of divination, it was pretended that, among other things, the progreſs of chriſtianity (which was certainly a moſt intereſting event to the heathen world in general) was foretold by them. Eunapius, ſpeaking of the philoſopher Antonine, ſays, " At that time he
" was not accounted more than a man, and
" converſed among men; yet he foretold
" to all his diſciples, that after his death
" there would be no temples, but that the
" magnificent and ſacred temple of Serapis
" would be laid in ruinous heaps, and that
" fabulous confuſion and unformed dark-
" neſs would tyrannize over the beſt parts
" of the earth, all which things time has
" brought to paſs, and his prediction has

* Lardner's Teſtimonies, vol. 4. p. 194.

" obtained

"obtained the credit of an oracle *." It was generally believed among the heathens, that there was an oracle which declared that the chriſtian religion would continue three hundred and ſixty-five years; and many were converted when they found that there was no truth in that oracle †.

The moſt remarkable thing in the hiſtory of paganiſm, after chriſtianity came to be the eſtabliſhed religion of the Roman empire, was a ſolemn conſultation, and divination, of the heathen philoſophers, in the year 374, to find out who ſhould ſucceed the Emperor Valens ‡. They were extremely uneaſy at the great progreſs of chriſtianity, and were very deſirous that the next emperor might be an heathen. This conſultation being diſcovered, thoſe who were concerned in it, and eſpecially Maximus, who had been a great favourite of Julian, were put to death §.

* Ibid. vol. 4. p. 195. † Ibid. vol. 4. p. 421.

‡ Ibid. vol. 4. p. 353.

§ That the reader may have ſome idea of the nature of this ſolemn *divination*, at which the graveſt of the hea-

The true ſpirit of the heathen religion, as held by the moſt eminent philoſophers in this age, may be ſeen in a ſtory concerning this Maximus, related by Eunapius,

then philoſophers aſſiſted, I ſhall copy the following account of it by Amminianus Marcellinus: "A tripod made "of laurel was artificially prepared, and conſecrated, with "certain preſcribed ſecret charms and invocations. It "was then placed in the middle of a room, perfumed "with Arabian ſpices. The charger upon which it was "ſet, had upon its utmoſt brim the four and twenty let-"ters of the alphabet, neatly engraved, and ſet at due diſ-"tances from each other. Then a perſon clad in linen "veſtments, with linen ſocks upon his feet, and a ſuitable "covering upon his head, came in with laurel branches "in his hands, and, after ſome myſtic charms performed, "he ſhook a ring, hanging at a curtain, about the edge of "the charger; which, jumping up and down, fell upon "ſuch and ſuch letters of the alphabet, where it ſeemed "to ſtay; the prieſt alſo then compoſing certain heroic "verſes, in anſwer to the interrogatories that had been "propoſed. The letters which the ring pointed out in "this caſe were four, ΘΕΟΔ, which being put together "compoſed theſe two ſyllables, Τυεον; whereupon one "that ſtood by preſently cried out, that the oracle plainly "intended *Theodorus*. Nor did we make any farther "enquiries, being all well ſatisfied that he was the perſon "intended." Lardner's Teſtimonies, vol. 4. p. 354.

who

who says that, "Soon after Julian's arrival "at Constantinople, he sent a messenger "with letters to Maximus and Chrysan- "thius, inviting them to come to him. "They thought proper to ask council of "the gods, but the omens which they re- "ceived were discouraging; whereupon "Chrysanthius plainly told Maximus, there "could be no thoughts of going to seek pre- "ferment. We must stay where we are. "Perhaps it may be needful for us to hide "ourselves. On the contrary, Maximus "said, we are not to content ourselves "with a single refusal; we ought rather "to force the gods till they give us a fa- "vourable answer suited to our wishes. "Chrysanthius replied that, he dared not "disobey the first admonitions which had "been received, and went away. Maxi- "mus renewed his enquiries till he ob- "tained such an answer as he wanted *."

Innumerable other things might be related of many of the heathen philosophers,

* Lardner's Testimonies, vol. 4. p. 370.

equal to any thing in the Popiſh legends. Nothing could exceed their ſuperſtition and credulity. Far, therefore, is it from being true, as ſome moderns, and eſpecially Mr. Gibbon, have pretended, that the belief in paganiſm was nearly worn out, and that it was an eaſy thing for chriſtianity to ſtep in, and take its place.

At this day good ſenſe teaches men toleration with reſpect to religion, and apprehends no inconvenience from it to the ſtate. But conſidering the notions and maxims which we have ſeen to have been adopted by the wiſeſt of the heathens, we cannot wonder that they were no friends to toleration, but, from principle, the moſt rigid perſecutors. This was the caſe with thoſe who, in other reſpects, were the very beſt of the emperors. But they really thought that they were promoting the welfare of the empire, by the extermination of chriſtians out of it.

Trajan, juſtly celebrated for his wiſdom and juſtice in other reſpects, was a perſecutor of the chriſtians. His edict againſt

them was never abrogated till the time of Conſtantine; and according to this, every preſident of a province was obliged to pronounce ſentence of death upon all who were brought before them, and acknowledged themſelves to be chriſtians *.

The elegant and philoſophical Pliny thought that thoſe who obſtinately refuſed to ſacrifice to the gods were juſtly deſerving of death; though he acknowledges, that when he had made enquiry by torture, of ſome who had abandoned the profeſſion of chriſtianity, he could not find that they were guilty of any thing elſe; and that, in their private aſſemblies, they bound themſelves by an oath to the practice of virtue.

Marcus Aurelius, the moſt philoſophical of the emperors, and who is famed for his moderation, was a more bigotted heathen than Trajan, and a more violent perſecutor of the chriſtians.

* Lardner's Teſtimonies, vol. 3. p. 341.

Hierocles, who wrote againſt the chriſtians, was himſelf a perſecutor, and an adviſer of perſecution *. When he was prefect of Alexandria, he inſulted, in the groſſeſt manner, ſome chriſtians who were brought before him, though they were perſons of great gravity; and he delivered ſome nuns to the bawds for the purpoſe of proſtitution †.

Julian wanted no good-will to extirpate chriſtianity, but he had ſeen the little effect of the more violent kind of perſecution in the former reigns, when chriſtians were far leſs numerous than they were in his time. He did not chuſe, therefore, to adopt the ſame meaſures, but he omitted no opportunity of ſhewing his malevolence to chriſtianity, and the profeſſors of it, in every method that he thought ſafe, and likely to be ſucceſsful. Lardner truly obſerves, that he was intent upon extirpating chriſ-

* Lardner's Teſtimonies, vol. 3. p. 237.

† Ibid. vol. 3. p. 241.

tianity

tianity with the greateſt diſpatch; and that, with all his pretenſions to right reaſon, and all his profeſſions of humanity, moderation, tenderneſs, and equity, he has not eſcaped the juſt imputation of being a perſecutor *.

In his letter to the prefect of Egypt, Julian ſays, "It concerns me extremely, that "all the gods are deſpiſed †." Libanius, ſpeaking of the ſeverities of former reigns, ſays, that "Julian diſſented from thoſe "who had practiſed ſuch things, as not "obtaining the end aimed at, and that he "was ſenſible that no benefit was to be "expected from ſuch violence. Conſider-"ing, therefore, theſe things, and that "their affairs had been increaſed by ſlaugh-"ters, he declined what he could not ap-"prove of ‡." He connived, however, at a tumult, in which George, the Arian biſhop of Alexandria, was murdered, and he baniſhed Athanaſius, Eleuſis of Cyzicum, and Titus of Boſtra, all biſhops of great diſtinction, on very ſlight pretences §. He

* Ibid. vol. 4. p. 110.
† Ibid. vol. 4. p. 100.
‡ Ibid. vol. 4. p. 134.
§ Ibid. vol. 4. p. 110.

not only deprived chriſtians of magiſtracies, and all honourable diſtinctions, but likewiſe, it is ſaid, of the rights of citizenſhip*. But what particularly diſtinguiſhes his reign is, his forbidding all chriſtians the benefit of human literature. "This," ſays Ammianus, a heathen hiſtorian, "was "an unmerciful law, and ought for ever to "be buried in ſilence, which forbids chriſ-"tians to teach grammar or rhetoric†."

As a reaſon for this law, Julian, in an ironical manner, unworthy of a prince, alleged that it was abſurd to teach the heathen writers, and at the ſame time not to eſpouſe their religion. With the ſame cruel ſneer he ſtripped the church of Edeſſa of its wealth, ſaying, that chriſtianity promiſed the kingdom of heaven to the poor.

That Julian would have extirpated chriſtianity, if it had been in his power, is evident from what he ſays of the books which had belonged to George, the Arian biſhop,

* Lardner's Teſtimonies, vol. 4. p. 39.

† Ibid. vol. 4. p. 178.

mentioned

mentioned before, which he ordered to be seized for his own use. Writing on the subject to the governor of Egypt, he says, "he had a large number of books, many philosophical and rhetorical, and also many "concerning the doctrines of the impious "Galileans, which I could wish to have utterly destroyed; but left books of value should "be destroyed with them, let those also be "carefully sought for *." Damascius, Lardner observes, appears to have approved of any attempts against christians, and the christian religion †.

It is remarkable that, during all the persecution of christians, which from the decree of Nero was never wholly intermitted, no heathen philosopher ever pleaded the cause of humanity and toleration, which was grosly violated in their persons; though Libanius commended Jovian for his toleration of the Pagans. On the whole, it is most evident, that the heathens did every thing in their power to ex-

* Ibid. vol. 4. p. 304. † Ibid. vol. 4. p. 304.

tirpate

tirpate the chriſtian religion, but were not able to do it.

We ſhall the leſs wonder at the unbelief of the moſt learned adverſaries of chriſtianity, and of the unrelenting violence with which they perſecuted the chriſtians, when we conſider how ignorant they were of the principles of chriſtianity. Lardner juſtly obſerves that, though we have ſo many letters of Pliny to Tacitus, and other learned men, his cotemporaries, and it appears from his own evidence, that chriſtians were numerous in Bythinia, the province in which he reſided, he never mentions to them the ſubject of chriſtianity*; ſo that it is moſt probable, he had never had the curioſity even to look into their books. The ſame is probable alſo concerning Marcus Aurelius†. This emperor, ſays, "from Diognetus I "learned not to buſy myſelf about vain "things, nor to give credit to wonder-"workers, ſtories of incantations, expelling "demons, and ſuch like things‡." Of Li-

* Lardner's Teſtimonies, vol. 2. p. 84.

† Ibid. vol. 2. p. 178. ‡ Ibid. vol. 2. p. 183.

banius

banius alſo, who wrote in a late period, Lardner obſerves, that he did not perceive that he had read either the New or the Old Teſtament *.

It is poſſible, however, that he and other learned heathens, might think it beneath them to mention chriſtian writers, though they *had* read their books, hoping perhaps to extinguiſh the memory of them by their ſilence. Lardner obſerves that Epictetus, and others, may have ſuppreſſed their own thoughts, and have been reſerved in their diſcourſes, leſt they ſhould excite inquiſitiveneſs in their hearers, and occaſion doubts about the popular deities, and the worſhip paid to them †. A ſimilar reaſon might alſo occaſion the ſilence of Joſephus. Celſus alſo, though he appears to have read the New Teſtament, never mentions the names of any of the writers ‡.

I am, &c.

* Ibid. vol. 4. p. 132. † Ibid. vol. 2. p. 394.
‡ Ibid. vol. 2. p. 338.

LETTER XIV.

Of the Objections to the hiſtorical Evidence of Chriſtianity in early Times.

DEAR SIR,

HAVING ſhewn in what manner the heathens were affected towards chriſtianity, I ſhall now proceed to ſhew what it was that they actually objected to it; and though none of their writings againſt chriſtianity, are now extant, it is not difficult to collect this from thoſe of the chriſtians who have noticed them, from the many fragments which have been preſerved of them, and from the hiſtory of the times in general. This has been done with great care by Dr. Lardner, in his *Jewiſh and Heathen Teſtimonies*, and for your uſe I ſhall abridge and digeſt, what he has collected.

Unbelievers of the preſent day may complain that the writings of heathens againſt chriſtianity,

chriſtianity are now loſt; but chriſtians lament this loſs much more than they do; and in all ages have paid more attention to them than the heathens themſelves did. Chryſoſtom ſays, that "the books againſt "chriſtianity, were ſo contemptible, that "they had been in a manner loſt long ago, "many of them periſhed almoſt as ſoon as "they appeared, and if they were ſtill to be "found any where, it was among the chriſ-"tians*." It is not denied, however, that there were edicts of chriſtian princes for the ſuppreſſion of theſe books of the heathens, as there had been ſimilar edicts of heathen emperors for ſuppreſſing the books of the chriſtians. But the different effect of theſe edicts is itſelf a proof of the different degree of attachment that was had to theſe books; and, conſequently, of the different degree of *credit* that was due to them. Had the objections of theſe heathen writers to chriſtianity been ſolid, it may well be preſumed that, ſince they had all the powers

* Lardner's Teſtimonies, vol. 2. p. 264.

of

of government in their favour, for near three hundred years, they would have effected their purpoſe, and of courſe have preſerved themſelves.

The moſt valuable, however, of all the writers againſt chriſtianity, was undoubtedly Celſus, the earlieſt of them; and it can hardly be doubted but that every thing of conſequence in him is preſerved in Origen's anſwer to him, as the arguments of Porphyry and Hierocles are preſerved in Euſebius, and thoſe of Julian in Cyril; beſides that we have ſeveral of Julian's own works, in which he reflects upon chriſtianity. Upon the whole, therefore, every impartial perſon muſt be ſatisfied, that we are at this day able to ſee a very clear ſtate of the objections to chriſtianity in all the early ages; and I ſhall now fairly exhibit them, without omitting any that can be thought by any unbeliever to be worth mentioning, beginning with thoſe that relate to the *credibility of the facts* in the goſpel hiſtory, which indeed are all that are worthy of much conſideration. For if the books be genuine, and the facts recorded

recorded in them be true, all other objections ſignify nothing. It will then be indiſputable, that the ſcheme has the ſanction of the Divine Being, and therefore, that we muſt reconcile to ourſelves the particular difficulties we meet with in revelation, as we do thoſe that we find in the works of nature, and the courſe of providence, that is, as well as we can.

It is remarkable that not one of the writers againſt chriſtianity in the early ages diſputed the genuineneſs of any of the hiſtorical books of the New Teſtament, or of the epiſtles of Paul. On the contrary, this important circumſtance is tacitly allowed by Celſus, Hierocles, and Julian, who quotes the goſpels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, as written before the death of John, and that of John as written by himſelf. In ſhort, not one of theſe heathen writers expreſſes any opinion on this ſubject different from that which was held by all chriſtians, in all times, viz. that the books were written by the perſons whoſe names they bear; and that they were publiſhed before their deaths.

deaths. Celſus, indeed, ſays that the writers had altered ſome things, but of this he does not appear to have brought any proof *. And Hierocles endeavoured to diſparage the writers, by calling them illiterate, liars, and impoſtors †. But theſe alſo are mere terms of reproach, without proof or probability. With more aſſurance, he ſaid that, Jeſus had been expelled from Judea, and after that committed robberies, accompanied by a band of nine hundred men ‡. But he might as well have ſaid, that he took Jeruſalem by ſtorm, and made himſelf king of it. Such aſſertions as theſe, without any circumſtances to make them probable, are deſerving of nothing but contempt.

It does not appear whether Celſus admitted the miracles of Jeſus or not. But as he did not expreſsly deny them, or endeavour to refute the account of them in the goſpels, it is probable that he had no great objection to any of them, except to that of the

* Lardner's Teſtimonies, vol. 2. p. 345.

† Ibid. vol. 3. p. 243. ‡ Ibid. vol. 3. p. 245.

reſurrection.

reſurrection. He ſays that, "even if we "admit that Chriſt healed the ſick, raiſed "the dead, fed multitudes with a few "loaves, &c. it would not follow that "he was the ſon of God, but that he "might be ſuch an impoſtor as the Egyp-"tian magicians*." He inſinuates that the apoſtles and other chriſtians might work miracles by the ſame means. For he ſays that, in his time, they had books of charms in barbarous languages†. Both this writer, and the unbelieving Jews ſaid, farther, that Jeſus learned magical arts in Egypt‡.

But to ſay nothing of the time when Jeſus was there, which, according to the common opinion, was only in his infancy, it is well obſerved by Dr. Lardner, that if diſeaſes could have been cured by any art then known in Egypt, we ſhould certainly have heard more of the effects of it; and

* Ibid. vol. 2. p. 294. † Ibid. vol. 2. p. 327.

‡ Ibid. vol. 1. p. 29. 194. vol. 2. p. 287.

the emperors, and others, would, no doubt, have learned it, as well as Jeſus *.

Of the ſame nature with this, and equally undeſerving of any ſerious anſwer, is the aſſertion of ſome Jews, that Jeſus worked his miracles by means of the name of God, which he ſtole out of the temple. As to the power of magic, it was always ſuppoſed to be derived from the heathen deities, and therefore it would have been extraordinary indeed if they had permitted Jeſus and his diſciples, to employ it to the deſtruction of their own empire.

It was alſo ſaid by the heathens, that, allowing Chriſt to have wrought miracles, things of as wonderful a nature had been done before. Celſus laid hold of the ſtories in the Greek mythology, to oppoſe to the miracles of Jeſus, and thoſe of the Jewiſh prophets †. Hierocles did not deny the miracles of Chriſt, but he ſaid that even greater things had been done by Apollo-

* Lardner's Teſtimonies, vol. 2. p. 297.

† Ibid. vol. 3. p. 267.

nius.

nius *. And Marcellinus, in his letter to Auſtin, ſaid the heathens were then continually talking of their Apollonius, Apuleius, and other magicians, whoſe miracles, they ſaid, were greater than thoſe of our Saviour †.

As the miracles of Apollonius will not be contended for by any modern unbeliever, it is ſufficient to ſay upon this ſubject with Dr. Lardner, "Some will aſk how came it "to paſs that many heathen people were "ſuppoſed to equal Apollonius to Jeſus, or "even to prefer him before our Lord. I "anſwer, the reaſon was, that they were "willing to lay hold of any thing that "offered, to ſave the ſinking cauſe of poly-"theiſm, and the rites belonging to it; as "ſhipwrecked men catch at every twig, or "ſtraw that comes in their way to ſave "themſelves from drowning ‡."

How ready the heathens were to cavil at the goſpel hiſtory, and how much we may depend upon it, that they would have de-

* Ibid. vol. 3. p. 235. † Ibid. vol. 4. p. 438.
‡ Ibid. vol. 3. p. 262.

tected any impoſition with reſpect to it, if it had been poſſible for them to do it, we may clearly infer from the apparent inſignificance of many of their objections. Thus Celſus ſays, the diſciples did not believe in Jeſus, becauſe they forſook him in his laſt ſufferings*. He alſo ſays, "Who ſaw the "reſurrection of Chriſt? A diſtracted wo-"man, and one or two more of the ſame im-"poſture, and ſome dreamers, who fancied "they ſaw things as they deſired to have "them; the ſame that had happened to in-"numerable people†." This diſtracted woman was Mary Magdalen, a perſon of character and fortune, who had been inſane, but was then in her ſober ſenſes; and neither ſhe, nor any of the diſciples, expected to ſee Jeſus again. This writer does not even take notice of the great number who did ſee him repeatedly, or, of the opportunity they had of examining at leiſure the perſon of Jeſus, and of their being, in conſequence of this, fully ſatisfied, that he was riſen from the

* Lardner's Teſtimonies, vol. 2. p. 361.

† Ibid. vol. 2. p. 306.

dead;

dead; ſo far was he from chuſing to enter into a critical examination of the evidence of this remarkable fact.

With reſpect to this reſurrection, Celſus alſo ſays, that, "if Jeſus would have mani-"feſted his divine power, he ſhould have "ſhewn himſelf to them that derided him, "to him that condemned him, and indeed to "all. For ſurely he had no reaſon to fear "any mortal, now after he had died, and, "as you ſay, was a God*." I have already conſidered this objection, which derives no force from the time in which it was made, and I have ſhewn the futility of it.

The moſt important circumſtance relating to the evidence of chriſtianity, is the number of the converts to it near the time of the facts on which it was founded. Both the number, and the rank, as well as character of theſe converts, were much miſrepreſented by Julian. He ſays, "Jeſus "having perſuaded a few among you, and "thoſe the worſt of men, has now been

* Ibid. vol. 2. p. 307.

"celebrated three hundred years, having "done nothing in his life-time worthy "of remembrance; unleſs one think it a "mighty matter to cure lame and blind "people, and exorcize demoniacs in the "villages of Bethſaida, and Bethany*." Theſe few converts, on the day of pentecoſt only, which was the firſt day of the publication of the goſpel, amounted to three thouſand, and preſently after they may be computed to have been about ten thouſand, and in a few years they muſt have been many times that number, in Judea itſelf. And no ſooner was the goſpel preached in gentile countries, but the number of converts, as has been ſhewn, became very conſiderable. That theſe converts were the *worſt of men*, was notoriouſly falſe, unleſs by this phraſe, Julian meant what he appears to have done by ſimilar phraſes in other places, viz. men who ſet themſelves to overturn the religion of the Roman empire. But this they might have done, and

* Lardner's Teſtimonies, vol. 4. p. 79.

yet

yet have been men of the moſt exalted piety and virtue. Porphyry alſo, willing to ſtigmatize the apoſtles, charges them, but without any proof, with being deceivers, influenced by worldly views *.

In anſwer to ſuch charges as theſe, Origen, who muſt have known who the chriſtians were, and what kind of people they had been, and whoſe veracity was never called in queſtion (except in modern times, by Moſheim, and Dr. Horſley, who, on being called upon to do it, has not been able to make good his charge againſt him) ſays, "there "were more chriſtian converts from no very "bad life, than from thoſe who had been "abandoned †."

Indeed, from the nature of the caſe, it may be ſuppoſed that the firſt chriſtian converts were perſons of an inquiſitive turn of mind, which is ſeldom the character of thoſe who are very profligate; and their readineſs to abandon their vices, and to embrace a doctrine which required the ſtricteſt purity and

* Ibid. p. 390. † Ibid. vol. 2. p. 280.

rectitude of conduct, and even to ſacrifice their lives in the cauſe of truth (a temper of mind not acquired all at once) ſhews that they could not have been ill-diſpoſed with reſpect to moral virtue, even before their converſion to chriſtianity. Some of them, no doubt, had been men of immoral characters, and the excellency of chriſtianity appeared by its reclaiming them.

As to the miracles of our Saviour, which Julian ridicules, but the truth of which he does not diſpute, any one of the things which he mentions, ſuch as curing the lame and the blind, and exorcizing demoniacs (though he paſſes over in ſilence all the more conſpicuous and ſplendid miracles) was a ſufficient proof of a divine miſſion; ſince it is manifeſtly above the power of man to do any of them. This objection, however, to our Lord's miracles, as inconſiderable things, we hear of in a later period. Thus, in Auſtin's time, it was ſaid that the diſpoſſeſſing of dæmons, healing ſick people, and even raiſing men to life, (which it was ſaid, but without truth, ſome

others

others had done) were ſmall matters to be performed by the deity *.

Julian farther ſays, "the firſt chriſtians "were content to deceive maid ſervants, and "ſlaves, and beſides them ſome men and "women, ſuch as Cornelius and Sergius. "If there were any other men of eminence "brought over by you, I mean in the times "of Tiberius and Claudius, when theſe "things happened, let me paſs for a liar in "every thing I ſay †."

The converſion of Cornelius and Sergius Paulus Julian had from the book of Acts, the truth of which he did not diſpute. But the ſame book, and alſo the epiſtles of Paul (the genuineneſs of which was never queſtioned) ſhew clearly that, beſides Cornelius and Sergius, there were ſeveral other men of rank and eminence who became chriſtians. If a great number of the gentile converts had not been opulent, they could not have made the liberal contributions which they did to the poor in Jeruſalem; and though many of

* Lardner's Teſtimonies, vol. 4. p. 442.

† Ibid. vol. 4. p. 83.

theſe

these were in low circumstances, their wants had been relieved by the sale of estates belonging to the richer among them.

Besides this, Julian takes advantage of the little that was then certainly known of the age of the apostles, and also confines his observations to the times of Tiberius and Claudius. For presently after this, it is notorious that there were many christians, in every distinguished rank in life. Christian writers very soon equalled in numbers and ability those among the heathens, and before the time of Constantine far exceeded them. With respect to *wealth*, the revenues of some of the churches, even during the time of persecution, were complained of as exorbitant. As to *rank*, it appears from the epistles of Paul, that there were christians even in the family of the emperor; and Tertullian seems to intimate that, when he wrote his Apology, which was at the close of the second century, there was a considerable number of christians in the Senate *.

* Lardner's Testimonies, vol. 4. p. 394.

With

With reſpect to the ſpread of chriſtianity, it may be proved that it went on uniformly gaining ground, from the time of its promulgation to the eſtabliſhment of it by Conſtantine; which fact alone is, as I have ſhewn, a ſufficient proof of the progreſs which it had made before that time; and without appealing to the writings of chriſtians, and the facts mentioned by any of them. This may be abundantly proved from the teſtimony of the heathens themſelves.

The number of chriſtians muſt have been very great in the time of Pliny, about eighty years after the death of Chriſt, and about ſeventy after the firſt preaching of the goſpel to the gentiles, as appears from his own letters to Trajan on the ſubject. As a magiſtrate, Pliny was much embarraſſed what to do with the number of chriſtians who were brought before him, in whom he found no other crime than that they were chriſtians. A part of one of his letters I ſhall copy.

Having related what he had heard of what was tranſacted in their private aſ-

ſemblies,

ſemblies, which has been referred to before, he ſays, "After receiving this account, I judged it the more neceſſary to "examine, and that by torture, two maid "ſervants, who were called miniſters; but "I have diſcovered nothing beſides a bad "and exceſſive ſuperſtition. Suſpending, "therefore, all judicial proceedings, I have "recourſe to you for advice. For it has "appeared to me a matter highly deſerving "conſideration, eſpecially on account of the "great number of perſons who are in danger of ſuffering. For many of all ages, "and every rank, of both ſexes likewiſe, "are accuſed, and will be accuſed. Nor "has the contagion of this ſuperſtition "ſeized cities only, but the leſſer towns "alſo, and the open country. Nevertheleſs, it ſeems to me that it may be reſtrained, and corrected. It is certain that "the temples, which were almoſt forſaken, "begin to be more frequented, and the "ſacred ſolemnities, after a long intermiſſion, are revived. Victims likewiſe are "every where bought up, whereas for ſome

"time

"time there were few purchasers. Whence "it is easy to imagine what numbers of "men might be reclaimed, if pardon was "granted to those who shall repent*."

This letter alone is a sufficient proof of the astonishing progress that christianity had made, in a short space of time after the promulgation of it, and at a considerable distance from the place of its rise. What progress it had made in the time of Julian, in whose reign it was no man's interest to be a christian, appears from many passages in his own writings, and especially from what passed at Antioch, when he went to pay his homage to the famous temple of Apollo and Daphne, in the neighbourhood of that city, and found neither people nor sacrifice. The priest only, at his own expence, had provided a small victim. On this occasion the emperor heavily complained, that so large a city had not prepared some bulls for a sacrifice on that solemnity†.

* Lardner's Testimonies, vol. 2. p. 13.

† Ibid. vol. 4. p. 105.

These

Theſe are proofs of ſuch a ſpread of chriſtianity as might have been expected from its being founded on truth, having had to ſtruggle with deep rooted prejudices of various kinds, but ſtill making its way by its own evidence, till idolatry was every where finally exterminated. It were to be wiſhed, that it had had no aid of this kind. However, as the progreſs it had made by its own ſtrength, in the face of all oppoſitions had been uniform, in the courſe of near three hundred years, there can be no doubt but that the ſame end would have been effected (and, I believe, ſooner, at leaſt more completely) without any aid from civil power at all.

Theſe are all the objections that I can find to have been advanced, by any of the ancient writers againſt chriſtianity, with reſpect to the proper, or hiſtorical evidence of it; and I dare ſay you will be ſurprized that they are ſo few, and ſo inſignificant. They certainly amount to no proof of impoſture in the founders of chriſtianity.

That

That it was not in the power of perſecution to ſtop the progreſs of chriſtianity, was ſufficiently proved. It was even acknowledged, and lamented by its adverſaries, that it had a contrary effect. Maximin, in one of his reſcripts, ſays, "It is, "I am perſuaded, well known to yourſelf, "and to all men, how that our Lords, and "Fathers, Diocleſian and Maximian, when "they ſaw that almoſt all mankind were "forſaking the worſhip of the gods, and "going over to the ſect of the chriſtians, "did rightly ordain, that all men who had "forſaken the worſhip of the immortal "gods, ſhould be called back again to the "worſhip of the gods by public pains and "penalties. But when I firſt of all came "into the eaſt, and perceived that great "numbers of men, who might be uſeful "to the public, were by the before-mentioned cauſes baniſhed by the judges into "ſeveral places, I gave orders that, for the "future, none of them ſhould be ſevere "towards the people of their province, but "rather endeavour to reduce them to the

" worſhip of the gods by fair words, and " good uſage *."

In another reſcript concerning the chriſtians, he ſays, " Foraſmuch as it has been " manifeſtly found, by the experience of a " long courſe of time, that they cannot by " any means whatever be induced to de- " part from this obſtinacy of diſpoſition, " you are therefore to write to the curators, " and other magiſtrates, and to the go- " vernors of the villages of every city, that " they are no longer to concern themſelves " in this affair †."

The firmneſs with which chriſtians bore perſecution and death, in all forms, was ſo far from being denied by their adverſaries, that it was, as I have ſhewn, the ſubject of complaint, and even of reproach among them. On the other hand, the heathens ſhewed no ſuch reſolution when their religion was diſcountenanced by the ſtate. Auſtin ſays, " Who of the pagans has been " found ſacrificing ſince ſacrifices have been

* Lardner's Teſtimonies, vol. 3. p. 310.

† Ibid. vol. 3. p. 302.

" prohi-

" prohibited by the laws, and did not deny " it? Who of them has been found wor- " ſhipping an idol, and did not cry out, I " have done no ſuch thing, dreading to be " convicted? On the other hand, the diſ- " ciples of Chriſt, by his words, and by " his example in dying and riſing again, " have been raiſed above the fear of " death*."

The heathens themſelves made a merit of their compliance with the laws in this reſpect. Libanius ſays, " I appeal to the " guardians of this law, who has known any " of thoſe whom you have plundered, to " have ſacrificed upon the altars, ſo as the " law does not permit? What young or " old perſon, what man, what woman, " &c†." Some weak chriſtian emperors threatened with death ſeveral acts of the heathen ſuperſtition, but we do not find that the threatened puniſhment was ever inflicted. In general, indeed, as Dr. Lardner obſerves, thoſe ſevere edicts were never

* Ibid. vol. 4. p. 458. † Ibid. vol. 4. p. 144.

carried into execution; and the heathens were permitted to write in defence of their religion, and againſt chriſtianity, without any moleſtation.

Julian diſſembled his ſtrong attachment to heatheniſm ten years, conforming in the ſtricteſt manner to the rites of a religion, which he inwardly deteſted, and which he was determined, if ever it ſhould be in his power, to ſuppreſs. This is the known conduct of moſt of the unbelievers of modern times. They are ſo far from making any difficulty of appearing as chriſtians, and even ſolemnly ſubſcribing to their belief of it, that they would laugh at the ſcruples of any man who ſhould refuſe to do it, if his intereſt required it. Moſt catholic countries abound with ſuch chriſtianized unbelievers. It is no ſecret, that many cardinals, and ſome popes, have had no real belief in chriſtianity, and have even been atheiſts. The generality of writers againſt chriſtianity are ſo far from riſking any thing in the cauſe of what they deem to be truth, that wherever there has been the ſhadow of

danger,

danger, they have always done it in a mean and covert manner, pretending to believe what they really wish to undermine. This has been the conduct of, I believe, every unbeliever who has put his name to his work, as that of Voltaire, and others abroad, and of Mr. Hume and Mr. Gibbon in this country.

I am, Yours, &c.

LETTER XV.

Of other Objections to Christianity in early Times.

DEAR SIR,

HAVING fairly stated to you all the objections that I can find to have been made to the proper, that is, the historical evidence of christianity, by any of its ancient adversaries, I now proceed to men-

tion their objections of other kinds. But I muſt obſerve, that none of theſe can amount to a refutation of the ſcheme, unleſs the things objected to either imply a contradiction, or inculcate groſs immorality. But nothing of this kind has ever been proved. In things of ſmall conſequence, it may ſafely be allowed that chriſtian hiſtorians, as well as others, may have been miſtaken, and alſo that chriſtian writers may, like other writers, have reaſoned ill. But this is mere *humanity*, and cannot affect that revelation which they had from God, and which was proved by miracles. It is not, however, foreign to my purpoſe to ſhew what kind of objections were really advanced againſt chriſtianity in early ages, that we may form ſome judgment concerning the ſtate of mind, and turn of thinking, in the unbelievers of thoſe times.

It is remarkable, that one of the ſtrongeſt objections to chriſtianity that we meet with was occaſioned by the miſtake of chriſtians, who, with a view to magnify the perſon of their maſter, exalted him firſt into a

demi-god,

demi-god, and afterwards into a God, equal to his own God and Father. And it was juſt, that what had been done with a view to remove the objection that had been made to chriſtianity, on account of the meanneſs and ignominious death of Chriſt (in which they, like the apoſtles, ought to have gloried) ſhould be thus turned to their diſadvantage.

In Celſus, the Jewiſh objector ſays to Chriſt, "What occaſion had you, when an "infant, to be carried into Egypt, leſt you "ſhould be killed. A God has no reaſon "to be afraid of death *." Celſus himſelf ſays, "the chriſtians argue miſerably when "they ſay, that the Son of God is the word "himſelf, and after all ſhew him to be a "miſerable man, condemned, ſcourged, and "crucified †." Ridiculing the doctrine of the incarnation, he ſays, "Was the mother of "Jeſus handſome, that God was in love with "her beauty? It is unworthy of God to "ſuppoſe him to be taken with a corruptible

* Lardner's Teſtimonies, vol. 2. p. 290.

† Ibid. vol. 2. p. 281.

 "body,

" body, or to be in love with a woman, " whether ſhe be of royal deſcent or other- " wiſe*." And again, " If God would " ſend forth a ſpirit from himſelf, what " need had he to breathe him into the " womb of a woman. For, ſince he knew " how to make men, he might have formed " a body for this ſpirit, and not have caſt " his own ſpirit into ſuch filth †."

It is with a view to the doctrine of the divinity of Chriſt, that Celſus ſays, " No " man would ever betray another at whoſe " table he ſat, and much leſs would he be- " tray a God ‡." " Chriſt being a God, " his ſufferings and death, to which he " had conſented, could not be grievous to " him §." He alſo ridicules the idea of God eating the fleſh of lambs, and drinking gall and vinegar ‖.

Alluding to the ſame doctrine, Porphyry ſays, " If the Son of God be logos, he muſt

* Lardner's Teſtimonies, vol. 2. p. 288.

† Ibid. vol. 2. p. 288. ‡ Ibid. vol. 2. p. 302.

§ Ibid. vol. 2. p. 303. ‖ Ibid. vol. 2. p. 304.

" be

" be the outward or inward logos; but he " was neither *."

Julian, who was better acquainted with the true principles of chriſtianity, charges the chriſtians with introducing a ſecond God, contrary to Moſes and the prophets †; and ſays, that " neither Paul, nor Matthew, " nor Luke, nor Mark, dared to call Jeſus " God, but honeſt John, after the death of " Peter and Paul ‡." Other philoſophers, however, continued to repeat the ſame objection. Libanius, ſpeaking of Julian, ſays, " By the guidance of philoſophy he " ſoon wiped off the reproach of impiety, " and learned the truth, and acknowledged " thoſe for gods who were ſuch indeed, " inſtead of him who was only thought to " be ſo §."

Voluſian, in his correſpondence with Auſtin, ſays, " I cannot conceive that the " Lord and governor of the world ſhould " be lodged in the body of a virgin, and

* Ibid. vol. 3. p. 171. † Ibid. vol. 4. p. 75.

‡ Ibid. vol. 4 p. 80. § Ibid. vol. 4. p. 133.

"lie there ten months, and then be brought "forth, without prejudice to the virginity "of his mother*." Alſo Marcellinus, a chriſtian, tells Auſtin, that the doctrine of our Lord's incarnation was a ſubject of common diſcourſe, was much diſliked, and cenſured by many, and that Auſtin would therefore do well to clear it up †.

In the proceeding articles the chriſtians themſelves gave but too much occaſion to the objection that was made to their religion, and the ſame was the caſe with reſpect to ſome others. Porphyry, for example, objected to the doctrine of *everlaſting puniſhments*, as contrary to our Saviour's own maxim, "with whatever meaſure "you mete, it ſhall be meaſured to you "again‡." The language in which the Fathers often expreſs themſelves leads us to think that many of them, at leaſt, did hold the doctrine of the proper eternity of hell torments, though nothing can be more

* Lardner's Teſtimonies, vol. 4. p. 436.

† Ibid. vol. 4. p. 438. ‡ Ibid. vol. 3. p. 188.

contrary

contrary to reaſon, or be leſs countenanced by the true ſenſe of ſcripture, in which the duration of future puniſhment is expreſſed in terms of an indefinite ſignification; and which abounds with maxims utterly irreconcileable with that doctrine, repreſenting the government of God as perfectly equitable, and approving itſelf to the reaſon of men.

The ſuperſtition of the primitive times gave but too much reaſon for Julian's ſaying, that "the chriſtians worſhipped the "wood of the croſs, and made ſigns of it "upon their foreheads*." He alſo charged chriſtians with killing ſome who perſiſted in the ancient religion (which, however, does not appear to have been the caſe) and ſome heretics; but he ſays, "it was "their own invention, and not the doc-"trine of Jeſus, or of Paul†." We may add, in this place, that the monks were a juſt object of ridicule to the heathens, as idle people, and burthenſome to the community.

* Ibid. vol. 4. p. 82. † Ibid. vol. 4. p. 467.

In

In many other cafes, however, neither chriftianity itfelf, nor the profeffors of it, gave any juft occafion to the objections that were made to it, and leaft of all to that of Celfus, that "the doctrine of Chrift con-"tained nothing new or weighty*." The doctrine of a refurrection, and of a future life was certainly new to the heathen world; and if any thing be *weighty*, this is. Notwithftanding this, it was commonly ridiculed by the heathens in general, and by Celfus in particular †. They faid the thing was impoffible, and therefore incredible. They thought the body unworthy of being raifed, and that the foul would do better without it. That the thing is *impoffible* to that power which originally made man, will hardly be advanced at this day; and modern unbelievers will not readily join their predeceffors in their doctrine concerning the peculiar happinefs of a foul difengaged from the incumberance of a body.

* Lardner's Teftimonies, vol. 2. p. 310.

† Ibid. vol. 2. p. 312.

It was an ancient, as well as a modern objection to chriſtianity, that the knowledge of it is not univerſal. This was urged by Celſus *, by Porphyry †, and by Julian ‡. To this it is ſufficient to ſay, that the Divine Being may have good reaſons for diſtributing all his favours very unequally. He has given to men more underſtanding than to brutes; he has given to ſome men a better underſtanding than to others; and he gives to ſome ages, and to ſome nations, advantages which he denies to others. But in this his equity cannot be impeached, ſo long as no improvement is required of what has not been beſtowed; and as to his *wiſdom* in theſe unequal diſtributions, it muſt certainly be great preſumption in man to arraign that.

There is no end of the objections that have been made to chriſtianity, in ancient or modern times, from the miſtakes of the objectors, or their cavilling at things of no moment. Thus Celſus objects to chriſtians

* Ibid. vol. 2. p. 318. † Ibid. vol. 3. p. 185.
‡ Ibid. vol. 4. p. 72.

the

the ſentiments of the Gnoſtics*. Porphyry charged Peter with imprecating death on Ananias and Saphira †, when, in reality, he only foretold what the divine Being would do. Porphyry alſo ſaid, it was improbable that Nebuchadnezzar ſhould ſhew that reſpect to Daniel which is aſſerted in his book ‡. He ridiculed the queen, mentioned in the account of Belſhazzar's feaſt, ſuppoſing her to have been his wife, as knowing more than her huſband §; and he confounds Darius the Mede with Darius the ſon of Hyſtaſpes ‖.

The Pagans in the time of Auſtin ſaid, how could God reject the old ſacrifices, and inſtitute a new mode of worſhip ¶. But it does not appear that God has rejected the old ſacrifices, though, the Jewiſh temple being deſtroyed, the ſervice of it cannot now be performed, as it may be at the reſtoration of the Jews to their own country; when,

* Lardner's Teſtimonies, vol. 2. p. 331.
† Ibid. vol. 3. p. 172. ‡ Ibid. vol. 3. p. 138.
§ Ibid. vol. 3. p. 140. ‖ Ibid. vol. 3. p. 142.
¶ Ibid. vol. 4. p. 439.

according

according to the prophecies of Ezekiel, the temple will be rebuilt, and the ſervice of it reſumed. Beſides, admitting the principles of thoſe who object to the reſtoration of ſacrifices, as only adapted to the infant ſtate of the world, it is not contrary to the analogy of nature, that things ſhould be in a progreſſive ſtate, always approaching nearer to perfection.

In the time of Auſtin it was ſaid, that chriſtianity was inconſiſtent with the good order of ſociety, in conſequence of the paſſive conduct which it recommended*. But the only pretence for this are ſome proverbial expreſſions of our Saviour, which ſome have underſtood too literally.

Hierocles ſaid, that the ſcriptures overthrew themſelves by their contradictions †. But it does not appear what kind of contradictions he meant. They could not be any that affect the credibility of the principal facts, and it is on theſe alone that the truth of chriſtianity depends.

* Ibid. vol. 4. p. 439. † Ibid. vol. 3. p. 234.

Porphyry inferred the falſehood of chriſtianity from the diſputes between Paul and Barnabas, and other circumſtances of a ſimilar nature. But may not honeſt men ſee things in different lights, and ſometimes give way to intemperate heat? As they differed, it is the more probable that, if there had been any thing ſiniſter in the conduct of either of them, it would have come to light. Men that differ are not diſpoſed to ſcreen, or favour one another.

The eighteen arguments of Proclus againſt chriſtianity, did not affect the chriſtian religion in general, but only, or chiefly, the particular opinion of chriſtians, that the world had a beginning *. This, however, may eaſily be proved to have been true, by arguments that have no dependence on revelation.

Julian objected to the Moſaical account of the creation of the world, the fall of man, and the confuſion of tongues. He likewiſe found fault with the decalogue †. Intelligent

* Lardner's Teſtimonies, vol. 4. p. 288.

† Ibid. vol. 4. p. 74.

chriſtians

chriſtians alſo object to ſome of theſe things, concerning which Moſes himſelf could have had no information, except from tradition. But this does not affect the credibility of what he writes as having paſſed under his own eyes, and thoſe of his cotemporaries, the account of which was publiſhed in his own life-time. Julian's objections to the decalogue, could only ſhew his ignorance, or his malice.

The ſubject of *prophecy* has always been acknowledged to be attended with much difficulty, and therefore we do not wonder that unbelievers, in all ages, have urged their objections to it. Celſus ſays, that "the prophecies may be applied to many "others with more probability than to "Jeſus *." This is readily acknowledged to be the caſe with reſpect to many of the prophecies of the Old Teſtament, which have by ſome chriſtians been applied to Chriſt. But there are alſo ſome of them, which can apply to no other perſon; and it

* Ibid. vol. 2. p. 313.

cannot

cannot be denied that they were delivered ſome hundreds of years before he was born. The deſtruction of Jeruſalem, and the deſolation of Judea, were clearly foretold by our Saviour himſelf. The preſent diſperſed ſtate of the Jews is the ſubject of a whole ſeries of prophecy, beginning with Moſes. And if this remarkable people ſhould be reſtored to their own country, and become a flouriſhing nation in it, which is likewiſe foretold, few perſons, I think, will doubt of the reality of a prophetic ſpirit.

The prophecies of Daniel are ſo clear, that Porphyry ſays, "he did not foretel things "to come, but only related what had hap-"pened *." He alſo ſaid that the book of Daniel could not be genuine, becauſe it was written in Greek, as he argued from the ſtory of Suſannah. It is very evident, however, that ſome of the prophecies of Daniel relate to the Roman empire, which is deſcribed under various images, and this certainly did not exiſt at the time that the book of Da-

* Lardner's Teſtimonies, vol. 3. p. 134.

niel

niel was firſt tranſlated into Greek. The decay of the Roman empire is alſo mentioned in the book of Daniel, and this had not taken place in the time of Porphyry himſelf. As to the ſtory of Suſannah, it is no part of the book of Daniel, but a ſpurious work, probably written in Greek.

I have already obſerved that the great offence that was given by chriſtians, was their drawing people from the worſhip of the heathen gods, on which it was imagined the proſperity of the ſtate depended. On this account they were treated as atheiſtical, and profane perſons, and dangerous in a community. And it is well known that when perſons go under an ill name, and are on any account, generally odious, every thing bad is readily believed of them. Thus, becauſe chriſtians were often obliged to meet for religious worſhip in the night, they were charged with putting out the lights, and committing promiſcuous lewdneſs; and probably their eating bread and drinking wine in the celebration of the Lord's ſupper, might give occaſion to its being ſaid, that

they killed and eat children, as we find in Celſus*.

Beſides that every thing of this nature is in the higheſt degree incredible, no proof was ever pretended to be brought of ſuch practices; and when ever any enquiry was made into their conduct, nothing was ever diſcovered to their diſcredit. All that Pliny could find upon the ſtricteſt ſcrutiny, and from thoſe who had deſerted them, was (as we find from his epiſtle to Trajan) as follows: "The whole of their fault, or error, lay in "this, that they were wont to meet toge- "ther on a ſtated day, before it was light, "and ſing among themſelves, alternately a "hymn to Chriſt, as a god, and to bind "themſelves by an oath, not to the com- "miſſion of any wickedneſs" (with which they had been often charged) "but not "to be guilty of theft, or robbery, or "adultery, never to falſify their word, nor to "deny a pledge committed to them, when "called upon to return it. When theſe

* Lardner's Teſtimonies, vol. 2. p. 335.

"things

" things were performed, it was their cuſ-
" tom to ſeparate, and then to come toge-
" ther again to a meal, which they eat in
" common, without any diſorder. But this
" they had forbore ſince the publication of
" my edict, by which, according to your
" commands, I prohibited aſſemblies. Af-
" ter receiving this account, I judged it the
" more neceſſary to examine, and that by
" torture, two maid ſervants, who were
" called *miniſters*. But I diſcovered nothing
" beſides a bad and exceſſive ſuperſtition *".

On occaſion of the vague and groundleſs accuſation of chriſtians, and the odium they unjuſtly lay under, Juſtin Martyr gives a ſimple and natural account of what was tranſacted in their aſſemblies, and then challenges their heathen adverſaries in a very proper manner on the ſubject. " On the day called
" Sunday," he ſays, " we all meet together,
" &c. &c. &c. On this day Jeſus Chriſt our
" Saviour roſe from the dead, —— and ap-
" peared to his apoſtles, and diſciples, and

* Ibid. vol. 2. p. 12.

" taught them thoſe things which we have
" ſet before you, and refer to your conſide-
" ration. If theſe things appear agreeable
" to reaſon and truth, pay a regard to them.
" If they appear trifling, reject them as
" ſuch. But do not treat as enemies, nor
" appoint capital puniſhment to thoſe who
" have done no harm. For we foretel
" unto you, that you will not eſcape the
" future judgment of God, if you perſiſt
" in unrighteouſneſs; and we ſhall ſay,
" *the will of the Lord be done**."

Julian more than once reproaches the heathen prieſts with the better morals of the chriſtians. In his letter to the high-prieſt of Galatia, he ſays, " if heatheniſm
" does not proſper according to our wiſh, it
" is the fault of thoſe who profeſs it——
" Why do not we look to that which has
" been the principal cauſe of the augmenta-
" tion of impiety, humanity to ſtrangers,
" care in burying the dead, and that ſanctity
" of life of which they make ſuch a ſhow;

* Lardner's Teſtimonies, vol. 2. p. 85.

" all

" all which things I will have to be really " practiſed by our people.—It is a ſhame, " when there are no beggars among the " Jews, and impious Galileans relieve not " only their own people, but ours alſo, that " our poor ſhould be neglected by us, and " be left helpleſs and deſtitute *."

Ammianus Marcellinus alſo, who cenſures the biſhops of Rome, ſays, " they " might be happy indeed, if, deſpiſing the " grandeur of the city, which they allege " as an excuſe for their luxury, they would " imitate the life of ſome country biſhops, " who by their temperance in eating and " drinking, by the plainneſs of their habit, " and the modeſty of their whole behaviour, " approve themſelves to the eternal deity, " and his true worſhippers, as men of virtue " and piety †."

Such were the objections that were advanced againſt chriſtianity, in early ages, when there was the beſt opportunity of enquiring into the grounds of it; and it is

* Ibid. vol. 4. p. 101. † Ibid. vol. 4. p. 183.

eaſy to ſee that they affect nothing on which its credibility at all depends. Admitting what the unbelievers of thoſe ages urged againſt the facts on which the truth of chriſtianity depends, it is evident that they had no pretence for rejecting it which a modern unbeliever would not be aſhamed to avow. And whatever may be ſaid of the good ſenſe of the early writers againſt chriſtianity, it is evident that it was no guard againſt the moſt deſpicable ſuperſtition, and the moſt unjuſt and cruel treatment of thoſe who differed from them on the ſubject of religion. Whatever were the virtues of Marcus Aurelius, or Julian, they did not teach them toleration or humanity, where religion was concerned; and ſo far were they from being the *eſprits forts* of the preſent age, that they gave into the moſt ridiculous credulity in divination, and all the other abſurd pretences of the heathen philoſophers and prieſts.

I am, yours, &c.

LETTER XVI.

Of the two laſt Chapters of the Firſt Book of Mr. Gibbon's Hiſtory of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire.

DEAR SIR,

THOUGH it is not my intention, in this correſpondence, to animadvert upon particular writers, yet, as you ſay that the *two laſt Chapters of Mr. Gibbon's Hiſtory* have made more unbelievers than any thing that has been publiſhed of late years; and have greatly contributed to confirm many in their unbelief, I ſhall, at your requeſt, take notice of ſuch of his obſervations as more properly affect the *hiſtorical evidence* of chriſtianity, and which I have not already noticed in the *Concluſion of my Hiſtory of the Corruptions of Chriſtianity*, in which I made ſome obſervations on what he has been pleaſed to call the ſecondary cauſes of its growth.

There I ſhewed how inadequate all the *five cauſes* he mentions are to account for the fact, without the *primary cauſe*, "the con-"vincing evidence of the doctrine itſelf," which he contents himſelf with indiſtinctly mentioning, in part of a ſentence, as wiſhing to keep it out of ſight as much as poſſible. For in what that *convincing evidence* conſiſted he does not ſay, whether in the nature of the doctrines themſelves, or in the truth of the great facts in the chriſtian hiſtory. As to what he ſays of "the ruling provi-"dence of its great author," it might be equally a proof of the truth of paganiſm, or Mahometaniſm, and no doubt he thought ſo.

Indeed, ſtrange as it may ſeem, Mr. Gibbon himſelf appears to have entirely overlooked the neceſſary connexion between his *ſecondary* and the *primary* cauſes of the growth of chriſtianity, though the former imply ſo firm a perſuaſion of the truth of it, in the minds of its profeſſors, as could never, in the natural courſe of things, have been produced without the real exiſtence of the great facts, which were the object of their faith.

faith. For, without mentioning any more of his cauſes, to ſuppoſe that the inflexible or intolerant zeal of the primitive chriſtians, and their firm belief in a future life, could have been produced without there being any truth in the hiſtory of the miracles, death, and reſurrection of Chriſt, is to ſuppoſe that a pile of building muſt be ſupported by pillars, but that thoſe pillars may ſtand in the air, without touching the ground; or with the Indians, that the world is ſupported by an elephant, and the elephant by a tortoiſe, but the tortoiſe by nothing.

What is moſt remarkable in Mr. Gibbon's conduct of his *argument* (for ſuch theſe two chapters of his hiſtory ought to be termed) is that, without pretending to conſider the proper evidence of the miracles of Chriſt, and thoſe of the apoſtles (the firm belief of which, by thoſe who were in circumſtances the moſt proper for the examination of them, muſt have produced all his ſecondary cauſes) he takes every opportunity of inſinuating, in the courſe of his narrative, every thing that he can to take from the effect of that evidence, which

he

he carefully keeps out of ſight. And though it is by groſs miſrepreſentation of facts, and giving them colours that by no means belong to them, they are ſuch as the unwary reader will not ſuſpect. Some of theſe only, I ſhall, in this letter, point out to you, that you may be upon your guard againſt others of a ſimilar nature. In his account, in particular, of the conduct of the heathen magiſtrates in the perſecution of chriſtians, and of the behaviour of the chriſtians under perſecution, he never fails to mention, or ſuppreſs, every thing that could make the former appear to advantage, and the latter to diſadvantage.

I have noticed the ſtrange conceſſion of Mr. Gibbon, that the Jews acted "in contradiction to every known principle of the "human mind, in yielding a more ready aſſent "to the traditions of their remote anceſtors, "than to the evidence of their own ſenſes" (*Hiſt. of Corruptions*, vol. 2. p. 445) without being aware, that no ſuch propoſition, relating to the ſentiments and conduct of *men*, can be true. I ſhall now quote another very

extraordinary

extraordinary assertion of his, relating to that *singular people*, as he calls them, and as they must indeed be, if they could *feel*, and *act*, as he supposes them to have done.

"The cotemporaries of Moses and Joshua," he says, p. 539. "beheld with the "most careless indifference the most amazing miracles;" by which he would insinuate that those miracles were never performed. But the only authority on which Mr. Gibbon could assert any thing concerning the miracles to which the Jews were witnesses, says, that they were far from being beheld with careless indifference. The Israelites were so much terrified with the appearances at Mount Sinai, that they requested that God would not speak to them any more in that manner, but by Moses. And so far were the miracles which they saw from making no impression on them, that notwithstanding their strong propensity to idolatry, their influence continued all that generation, and that which immediately succeeded it. We read Joshua xxiv. 31. *And Israel served the Lord all the days of Joshua,*

and all the days of the elders that outlived Joſhua, and who had known all the works of the Lord, that he had done for Iſrael.

An inſinuation that moſt nearly affects the credibility of the goſpel hiſtory, in Mr. Gibbon's account, is contained in the following paragraph. "The Jews of Paleſ-"tine," he ſays, p. 603, "who had fondly "expected a temporal deliverer, gave ſo cold "a reception to the miracles of the divine "prophet, that it was found unneceſſary to "publiſh, or at leaſt to preſerve, any He-"brew goſpel. The authentic hiſtory of "the acts of Chriſt were compoſed in the "Greek language, at a conſiderable diſ-"tance from Jeruſalem, and after the gen-"tile converts were grown extremely nu-"merous."

This muſt have been intended to inſinuate, that the *authentic goſpels*, were not publiſhed in the country where the facts were known, and that they were not much credited in Judea itſelf; whereas nothing is more certain than that the moſt zealous of all chriſtians, notwithſtanding the diſappoint-

ment

ment of their fond hopes of a temporal Meſſiah, were the Jewiſh converts, and that by them only was the goſpel propagated in diſtant countries. Theſe Jewiſh chriſtians alſo had a goſpel of their own, which was publiſhed as early, and was as much regarded, as any other; and whether Mr. Gibbon will call it *authentic*, or not, there was no material difference between it and the other goſpels, all containing an account of the miracles, death, and reſurrection of Chriſt. This Hebrew goſpel was preſerved as long as the Jewiſh chriſtians exiſted, and ſome of them remained till after the time of Auſtin.

The other goſpels, though written in Greek, for the uſe of thoſe who underſtood that language, and at a diſtance from Judea, were all written by Jews, and while the tranſactions were recent; and it was nothing but a well-grounded perſuaſion of their authenticity, that could have procured this remarkable hiſtory that firm credit which was given to it, in all parts of the world. Let Mr. Gibbon ſay how this effect could have

have been produced, if the gospel history had not been attended with every circumstance requisite to establish its credibility in that age, and consequently in all future ages.

Mr. Gibbon insinuates an objection to the evidences of christianity from its not having recommended itself, to some wise and virtuous heathens, in the early ages. "We stand in need," says he, p. 616, in his ironical manner, "of such reflections, to "comfort us for the loss of some illustrious "characters, which in our eyes might have "seemed the most worthy of the heavenly "present. The names of Seneca, of the "elder and the younger Pliny, of Tacitus, "of Plutarch, of Galen, of the slave Epic-"tetus, and of the emperor Marcus Anto-"ninus, adorn the age in which they flou-"rished, and exalt the dignity of human "nature. They filled with glory their "respective stations, either in active or "contemplative life. Their excellent un-"derstandings were improved by study. "Philosophy had purified their minds from

"the

" the prejudices of popular ſuperſtition, and
" their days were ſpent in the purſuit of
" truth and the practice of virtue. Yet
" all theſe ſages (it is no leſs an object of
" ſurprize than of concern) overlooked, or
" rejected, the perfection of the chriſtian
" ſyſtem. Their language, or their ſilence,
" equally diſcover their contempt of the
" growing ſect, which in their time had
" diffuſed itſelf over the Roman empire.
" Thoſe among them who condeſcend to
" mention the chriſtians, conſider them
" only as obſtinate and perverſe enthuſiaſts,
" who exacted an implicit ſubmiſſion to
" their myſterious doctrines, without being
" able to produce a ſingle argument that
" could engage the attention of men of ſenſe
" and learning."

In this there can be no doubt, but Mr. Gibbon gives his own opinion, in the form of that of the ancients, and afterwards, affecting to lament that the cauſe of chriſtianity was not defended by abler advocates, he ſays, that " when they would demonſtrate
" the divine origin of chriſtianity, they in-
" ſiſted

" fisted much more strongly on the pre-
" dictions which announced, than on the
" miracles which accompanied, the appear-
" ance of the Messiah."

If this had been the case, and if, with such miserable advocates, and such insufficient arguments, christianity had, as Mr. Gibbon says, " diffused itself over the Ro-
" man empire," so early as the time of Seneca, it will not be very easy for him to account for so extraordinary a fact. Here is a great *effect*, without any adequate *cause*. Yet this does not appear to have struck our philosopher, as any thing extraordinary. It satisfies him, that some thousands of people took it into their heads, without any reason at all, that Christ and the apostles wrought miracles, that they madly devoted their labours, their fortunes, and their lives, to the propagation of their groundless opinion, and that by their inflexible zeal, and obstinacy, they forced the belief of it on the rest of the world. Such is the philosophy of Mr. Gibbon, and of other unbelievers.

If

If Mr. Gibbon had read the New Teſtament with care, he would have ſeen that the firſt preachers of chriſtianity had no *myſterious doctrines* to teach. Hear what Paul ſays in the Areopagus at Athens. *The times of this ignorance God winked at, but now commandeth all men every where to repent. Becauſe he hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world in righteouſneſs, by that man whom he hath ordained, whereof he hath given aſſurance unto all men, in that he hath raiſed him from the dead*; and of this he himſelf, and more than five hundred others, as he ſays, 1 Cor. xv. 6. were witneſſes.

What is there *myſterious* in all this? Is it leſs intelligible, or in itſelf leſs probable, than the elegant mythology of Greece and Rome? If in that age the *miracles* were leſs particularly inſiſted on, it was becauſe they were not diſputed. They were not *things done in a corner*, but ſuch as whole countries were witneſſes of. The arguments from prophecy, which Mr. Gibbon ridicules, had their weight chiefly with the Jews, but were not improperly urged

upon the gentiles; who, ſeeing a wonderful correſpondence between the predictions and the events, would be ſenſible of the divinity of the whole ſyſtem of revelation, begun in Judaiſm, and completed in chriſtianity.

I am far from being diſpoſed to detract from the merit of Seneca, and the other diſtinguiſhed heathens here mentioned by Mr. Gibbon; though with reſpect to the younger Pliny, and Marcus Antoninus, he is far from being juſtified in ſaying, that "their minds were purified from the prejudices of the popular ſuperſtition." For it has been ſhewn that they, as well as Julian, were bigots to it. But let Mr. Gibbon produce what evidence he has of theſe men, of ſuch excellent underſtandings, and freedom from prejudice, having made any proper *enquiry* into the nature and truth of chriſtianity, and ſay what arguments they oppoſed to thoſe of the chriſtian teachers. Otherwiſe, their overlooking or rejecting chriſtianity implies no reflections upon *it*, but upon themſelves.

Notwith-

Notwithſtanding what Mr. Gibbon here ſays, that the chriſtian preachers could not produce "a ſingle argument that could engage the attention of men of ſenſe and learning," yet it is unqueſtionable, that whether it was by *argument*, or any other means, men of ſenſe, and learning too, did embrace chriſtianity; and that, in a very reaſonable ſpace of time, there was not a man of ſenſe or learning that did not. It ſhould alſo be conſidered, that none of the perſons mentioned by Mr. Gibbon ran any riſk by continuing heathens; whereas, in that age, a man hazarded every thing by becoming a chriſtian. Which of them, then, was more likely to enquire into the truth of chriſtianity, and by whoſe verdict ſhall we be beſt juſtified in abiding?

"How ſhall we excuſe," ſays Mr. Gibbon, p. 618, "the ſupine inattention of the "pagan and philoſophic world, to thoſe "evidences which were preſented by the "hand of omnipotence, not to their reaſon, "but to their ſenſes. During the age of "Chriſt, of his apoſtles, and of their firſt

"disciples, the doctrine which they preach-
"ed was confirmed by innumerable prodi-
"gies. The lame walked, the blind saw,
"the sick were healed, the dead were raised,
"dæmons were expelled, and the laws of
"nature were frequently suspended, for the
"benefit of the church. But the sages of
"Greece and Rome turned aside from the
"aweful spectacle; and pursuing the ordi-
"nary occupations of life or study, ap-
"peared unconscious of any alterations in
"the moral or physical government of the
"world. Under the reign of Tiberius,
"the whole world, or at least a celebrated
"province of the Roman empire, was in-
"volved in a præternatural darkness of
"three hours. Even this miraculous
"event, which ought to have excited the
"wonder, the curiosity, and the devotion
"of mankind, passed without notice, in an
"age of science and history."

This was, no doubt, meant to insinuate, that the miracles Mr. Gibbon recites were never performed, since they did not engage the attention of the sages of Greece and

Rome. But their *inattention*, I presume, has been sufficiently accounted for; and if they did not give proper *attention*, and did not trouble themselves to make the necessary *enquiries*, their unbelief reflects no discredit on christianity.

As to the *darkness* about which Mr. Gibbon makes so great a parade, it was not very likely to attract the notice of historians, as it was not so great, but that the persons who attended the crucifixion could see to give Jesus vinegar on a spear, and he could distinguish his mother and his disciple John.

With a view, no doubt, to insinuate that much credit was not given to the account of the miracles, death, and resurrection of Christ, by the inhabitants of Judea, Mr. Gibbon says, p. 635, "A more accurate "enquiry will induce us to doubt, whether "any of those persons who had been wit-"nesses to the miracles of Christ were per-"mitted, beyond the limits of Palestine, to "seal with their blood the truth of their "testimony."

Admitting all this, it is not denied but there were martyrs to chriſtianity, of thoſe who were witneſſes to the miracles of Chriſt, *within the bounds of Paleſtine*; and theſe were of more value than any others. And whether any of them ſuffered *without* the bounds of Paleſtine, or not, converts were made in other countries; and this muſt have been by the credit that was given to the accounts of the miracles of Chriſt, whether the teſtimony was ſealed with blood, or not. But the epiſtles of Paul are a ſufficient evidence of the great hardſhips to which himſelf, and many other chriſtians, were expoſed in *diſtant countries*. Mr. Gibbon cannot deny the reality of the perſecution under Nero, in Rome at leaſt; and in that perſecution, according to the teſtimony of the ancients, to which there is no reaſon to object, both Peter and Paul were put to death. It is likewiſe the general opinion, that, except the two James's (both of whom ſuffered at Jeruſalem) and John, who lived to a great age at Epheſus,

all

all the other apoſtles died martyrs without the bounds of Paleſtine. And it muſt be acknowledged, that the teſtimony of the apoſtles, thus *ſealed*, as Mr. Gibbon ſays, *with their blood*, was of more value than any other, as they had the moſt perfect knowledge of the hiſtory and character of Chriſt.

In order to ſuggeſt that it was a long time before the chriſtians ſuffered any legal perſecution from the Romans, Mr. Gibbon ſays, p. 647, "We may aſſure ourſelves, "that when he" (Pliny) "accepted the "government of Bythinia, there were no "general laws, or decrees of the Senate, in "force againſt the chriſtians; that neither "Trajan, nor any of his virtuous prede-"ceſſors, whoſe edicts were received into "the civil and criminal juriſprudence, had "publicly declared their intentions con-"cerning the new ſect; and that whatever "proceedings had been carried on againſt "the chriſtians, there were none of ſuffi-"cient weight and authority, to eſtabliſh a "precedent for the conduct of a Roman "magiſtrate."

On this I would obſerve, that when Pliny arrived in his province, it was evidently the cuſtom to condemn chriſtians to death, merely *as ſuch*, and whether this was done by a proper *law*, or otherwiſe, it was no leſs a trial of the faith of thoſe who ſuffered death. But both the letters of Pliny, and the anſwer of Trajan, ſhew that the proceedings had been upon an exiſting law, whether enacted by Trajan himſelf, or any of his predeceſſors. His anſwer clearly implies that he did not ſend the governor any *new law*, but only informed him how he ought to act with reſpect to convictions on a former law, inſtructing him to condemn thoſe who were proved to be guilty, but not to ſeek for proofs of guilt. A ſtrange and inconſiſtent proceeding, as was juſtly remarked by Tertullian. If the profeſſion of chriſtianity was deſerving of death, why might not the guilty be ſought for, as well as other criminals? And if it was not, why condemn to death thoſe who profeſſed it?

The probability is, that the law by which the chriſtians had been perſecuted was one

one of Nero, or Domitian; and to say nothing of the inscription found in Spain (which, however, Lardner supposes may be genuine) Orosius says, that the edict of Nero extended to the provinces. It is certainly highly probable, that he who put so many christians to death, and in so shocking a manner, would think the whole sect deserving to be extirpated in all parts of the empire.

Mr. Gibbon appears to have been sufficiently sensible of the value of such a testimony to the truth of the gospel history, as is furnished by the *early martyrdoms*; and therefore, he takes great pains to diminish their number; and when the facts cannot be denied, he endeavours to exhibit them in the most unfavourable light, as either a criminal obstinacy, or a mad and ridiculous contempt of life. And yet, though this is evidently his object, he cannot avoid mentioning such circumstances, as show the shocking cruelty and injustice of the persecutors, and the noble constancy of the persecuted. "Punish-"ment," he says, p. 650, "was not the in-"evitable

" evitable conſequence of conviction, and
" the chriſtians whoſe guilt was the moſt
" clearly proved, by the teſtimony of wit-
" neſſes, or even by their voluntary confeſ-
" ſion, ſtill retained in their own power the
" alternative of life or death. It was not ſo
" much the paſt offence, as the actual re-
" ſiſtance, which excited the indignation of
" the magiſtrate. He was perſuaded that
" he offered them an eaſy pardon, ſince, if
" they conſented to caſt a few grains of in-
" cenſe upon the altar, they were diſmiſſed
" from the tribunal in ſafety, and with ap-
" plauſe. It was eſteemed the duty of an
" humane judge to endeavour to reclaim,
" rather than to puniſh, thoſe deluded en-
" thuſiaſts. Varying his tone, according
" to the age, the ſex, or the ſituation of the
" priſoners, he frequently condeſcended to
" ſet before their eyes every circumſtance
" which could render life more pleaſing, or
" death more terrible; and to ſolicit, nay,
" to intreat them, that they would ſhow
" ſome compaſſion to themſelves, to their
" families, and to their friends. If threats

" and

" and perſuaſions proved ineffectual, he had " often recourſe to violence. The ſcourge, " and the rack, were called in to ſupply " the deficiency of argument; and every " act of cruelty was employed to ſubdue " ſuch inflexible, and as it appeared to the " pagans, ſuch criminal obſtinacy."

No doubt, the humanity of ſome of the Roman magiſtrates, led them to favour the chriſtians, in the manner that Mr. Gibbon has deſcribed. But others took every advantage that the laws, and the temper of the times, gave them, and indulged themſelves in acts of the moſt wanton barbarity.

With reſpect to the number of the martyrs, Mr. Gibbon ſeems to triumph, p. 653, in the confeſſion of Origen, who ſays that it was *inconſiderable*. But this term is comparative, and the real value of it muſt be eſtimated by a regard to *the whole*, of which it was *a part*; and then it may be inferred, that many hundreds, or even thouſands, might be ſaid to be inconſiderable. Origen ſays, that " the providence of God reſtrained

" the

"the violence of the perſecutors, leſt the "whole race of chriſtians ſhould be extir- "pated;" and then adds, "that they who "ſuffered death were few, and eaſily num- "bered." Contra Celſum, lib. 3. p. 116. From this it is evident, that, in the idea of Origen, the number of martyrs was few, when compared to the whole number of chriſtians, which, no doubt, conſiſted of many hundreds of thouſands in his time; and he could hardly have imagined there was any danger of the extirpation of the whole race of them, by the death of a much greater number than that to which Mr. Gibbon ſeems willing to reduce them.

Beſides, it was not by *death* only, that the faith and conſtancy of the chriſtians was ſhown. As Mr. Gibbon himſelf ſays, p. 652. "the Roman magiſtrates were "far from condemning all the chriſtians "who were accuſed before their tribunal, "and very far from puniſhing with death "all thoſe who were convicted of an obſti- "nate adherence to the new ſuperſtition; "contenting

" contenting themſelves, for the moſt part,
" with the milder chaſtiſements of im-
" priſonment, exile, or ſlavery in the mines."

Theſe things Mr. Gibbon mentions as milder chaſtiſements. But does not the ſuffering of ſuch puniſhments as theſe (ſome of them, in my opinion, far more trying than the proſpect of immediate death) ſufficiently evidence the firmneſs of the faith of the chriſtians, in the cauſe for which they ſuffered; and could ſo many thouſands have ſuffered in this manner without having taken ſome care to inform themſelves concerning the truth for which they ſuffered? Would Mr. Gibbon himſelf be content to be impriſoned, or to go to work in the mines for life, or " with the proſpect of a general
" pardon at ſome future, but uncertain time," p. 653, without being well ſatisfied that he had good reaſon for ſubmitting to it? And were there not among the chriſtians, who *did* ſuffer theſe things, and all that the utmoſt malice of their enemies could ſuggeſt, men who valued life, and the enjoyments of it,

it, as much as Mr. Gibbon can do, and who had as much to lose as he can have?

"The general assertion of Origen," Mr. Gibbon says, "may be explained, and con-
"firmed, by the particular testimony of his
"friend Dionysius, who, in the immense
"city of Alexandria, and under the rigor-
"ous persecution of Decius, reckons only
"ten men and seven women, who suffered
"for the profession of the christian name."
But if the account of Dionysius be examined, it will be found that, besides some horrid violences before this persecution, in which many lost their lives, the deaths of these seventeen persons are mentioned only on account of there being something remarkable in them. He is far from saying, with Mr. Gibbon, that these were *all* that suffered death; and he says that many professed their readiness to die, in so much that the judges shuddered, and the christians went out of the tribunal in triumph. He adds, that many were torn to pieces by the gentiles in other cities and villages.

Mr. Gibbon alſo ſays, p. 701, that "from "the hiſtory of Euſebius it may be col- "lected that only nine biſhops were puniſh- "ed with death; and we are aſſured by "his particular enumeration of the martyrs "of Paleſtine, that no more than ninety-two "chriſtians were entitled to that honour- "able appellation;" and from this he draws what he calls "a very important and pro- "bable concluſion," viz. that "the multi- "tude of chriſtians in the Roman empire, "on whom a capital puniſhment was in- "flicted by a judicial ſentence, will be re- "duced to ſomewhat leſs than two thou- "ſand perſons; whereas more than a hun- "dred thouſand are ſaid," p. 703, "to have "ſuffered, in the Netherlands only, by the "hand of the executioner."

Even this number would be abundantly ſufficient for all the purpoſes for which martyrdoms are alleged by the advocates for chriſtianity; conſidering *who* thoſe martyrs were, how capable they were of ſatisfying themſelves concerning the truth of chriſ- tianity, and how intereſted they were in the enquiry.

enquiry. But by looking into Euſebius, it will appear that Mr. Gibbon was no more authorized to aſſert that the ninety-two were the *only* martyrs in Paleſtine, than that the ſeventeen were the only ones in Alexandria. The probability is, that it was very far ſhort of the whole number.

Mr. Gibbon proceeds to relate the particulars of the martyrdom of Cyprian, and, as uſual with him, in a manner as favourable to the perſecutors, and as unfavourable to the martyr, as poſſible; as if he might have ſubmitted to death, in thoſe circumſtances, even without any real belief in chriſtianity, from the mere honour of ſuffering, and the infamy of ſhrinking from it. "Could we "ſuppoſe," ſays he, p. 659, "that the "biſhop of Carthage had employed the pro- "feſſion of the chriſtian faith only as the "inſtrument of his avarice or ambition, it "was ſtill incumbent on him to ſupport "the character he had aſſumed; and if he "poſſeſſed the ſmalleſt degree of manly for- "titude, rather to expoſe himſelf to the "moſt cruel tortures, than by a ſingle act to

"exchange

" exchange the reputation of a whole life " for the abhorrence of his chriſtian bre- " thern, and the contempt of the gentile " world. But if the zeal of Cyprian was " ſupported by the ſincere conviction of " the truth of thoſe doctrines which he " preached, the crown of martyrdom muſt " have appeared to him as an object of de- " ſire rather than of terror?"

But what made it ſo infamous to decline martyrdom, and ſo honourable to ſuffer it, but a general perſuaſion of the truth, and the infinite importance of the truth, of chriſtianity, for which they ſuffered? Whence aroſe this general and ſtrong perſuaſion of this truth, our hiſtorian does not inveſtigate. He here ſays, that, had Cyprian not ſuffered, he would have incurred the contempt of the gentile world. In a paſſage quoted above, he ſaid that, on throwing a few grains of incenſe into the fire, the chriſtians went from the tribunals of the magiſtrates with ſafety, and with applauſe. Let it then be one, or the other, as Mr. Gibbon's changing purpoſe may require.

Whatever was the *motive*, Mr. Gibbon does ſufficient juſtice to the readineſs of the primitive chriſtians to ſuffer martyrdom, in its moſt frightful forms. "The ſober diſ-"cretion of the preſent age," he ſays, p. 661. "will more readily cenſure than admire, but "can more eaſily admire, than imitate, the "fervour of the firſt chriſtians, who, ac-"cording to the lively expreſſion of Sulpi-"cius Severus, deſired martyrdom with more "eagerneſs than his own contemporaries ſo-"licited a biſhopric."

In this, I truſt, Mr. Gibbon judges from his own feelings only. The preſent chriſtian world in general holds the primitive martyrs in as high veneration, as did their cotemporaries (though neither they, nor the more judicious in the primitive times, approved of the zeal of any in courting martyrdom) and would be ready, I doubt not, if they were in the ſame manner called to it, to follow their example. In what age of the chriſtian church have there not been thoſe who may with propriety be called *martyrs* to what they held to be the truth of the goſ-

pel? Mr. Gibbon does not, he cannot deny, that there were thouſands of ſuch at the time of the reformation; and cannot he ſuppoſe that the ſame men would have been as ready to die for the profeſſion of chriſtianity, as for the doctrine of proteſtantiſm.

The only uſe that a defender of chriſtianity makes of the martyrdoms of chriſtians in early times, is as a proof of the firmneſs of their faith in the cauſe for which they ſuffered; ſuch a faith requiring an adequate *cauſe*. But this firm faith is as evident in the readineſs to ſuffer, as in the actual ſuffering, provided there be no doubt of the ſincerity of that profeſſed readineſs. But this was then ſo far from being doubted, with reſpect to the generality of thoſe who propoſed themſelves, that it was ridiculed, as madneſs and infatuation, by the heathens of thoſe times. And Mr. Gibbon, in the following account, evidently joins the heathens in this ridicule.

"The chriſtians," p. 661, "ſometimes "ſupplied by their voluntary declaration, "the want of an accuſer, rudely diſturbed

" the public ſervice of paganiſm; and ruſh-
" ing in crowds round the tribunals of the ma-
" giſtrates, called upon them to pronounce,
" and to inflict, the ſentence of the law. The
" behaviour of the chriſtians was too remark-
" able to eſcape the notice of the ancient phi-
" loſophers. But they ſeemed to have con-
" ſidered it with much leſs admiration than
" aſtoniſhment. Incapable of conceiving the
" motives which ſometimes tranſported the
" fortitude of believers beyond the bounds
" of prudence, or reaſon, they treated ſuch an
" eagerneſs to die as the ſtrange reſult of ob-
" ſtinate deſpair, of ſtupid inſenſibility, or of
" ſuperſtitious phrenſy. Unhappy men, ex-
" claimed the pro-conſul Antoninus, to the
" chriſtians of Aſia, unhappy men, if you
" are thus weary of your lives, is it ſo diffi-
" cult for you to find ropes and precipices?
" He was extremely cautious, as is obſerved
" by a learned and pious hiſtorian, of puniſh-
" ing men who had found no accuſers but
" themſelves, the imperial laws not having
" made any proviſion for ſo unexpected a
" caſe. Condemning, therefore, a few, as a

" warning for their brethren, he diſmiſſed " the multitude with indignation and con- " tempt."

To what purpoſe can it be to any man to endeavour, as Mr. Gibbon does, to reduce the number of chriſtian martyrs, when their *readineſs to ſuffer* martyrdom is not only acknowledged, but ridiculed; ſo that the *number* was a circumſtance that did not depend upon themſelves, but upon their adverſaries. This willingneſs to ſuffer martyrdom I own to be cenſurable, ſince our Saviour exhorts his followers not to court perſecution, but to avoid it, if it can be done with honour. But certainly this courting of ſuffering, is no argument of a leſs firm faith; and it is this firm faith that is alone of any uſe in proving the truth of thoſe facts which were the objects of it. That the faith of chriſtians in the truth of the goſpel hiſtory in thoſe early times (when it was not difficult for perſons who were ſufficiently in earneſt to diſcover the truth) was real, and not to be ſhaken by torture or death, Mr. Gibbon ſufficiently ac-

knowledges. Let him then account for this fact on the ſuppoſition of there being no truth in the goſpel hiſtory, if he can.

The inefficacy of perſecution to extirpate chriſtianity, is abundantly confeſſed by Mr. Gibbon, in his account of the conduct of Galerius, who was the prompter to what was called the Diocletian perſecution. "But "when Galerius," p. 694, "had obtained "the ſupreme power, and the government of "the Eaſt, he indulged in the fulleſt extent "his zeal and cruelty, not only in the pro- "vinces of Thrace and Aſia, which acknow- "ledged his immediate juriſdiction, but in "thoſe of Syria, Paleſtine, and Egypt; where "Maximin gratified his own inclination, by "yielding a rigorous obedience to the ſtern "commands of his benefactors. The fre- "quent diſappointments of his ambitious "views, the experience of ſix years of perſe- "cution, and the ſalutary reflections which a "lingering and painful diſtemper ſuggeſted "to the mind of Galerius, at length con- "vinced him, that the moſt violent efforts

"of

" of deſpotiſm are inſufficient to extirpate " a whole people, or to ſubdue their religious " prejudices." Is it not extraordinary that Mr. Gibbon ſhould be able to write this, if he reflected at all on what he wrote, without believing that the faith of chriſtians ſtood on no very ſlight foundation?

I have now, I think, explained myſelf as fully as I have been able, on every article relating to the evidence of revealed religion, to which you wiſhed that I would give particular attention; and ſubmitting all that I have advanced to your own calm and ſerious conſideration, I ſubſcribe myſelf,

Dear Sir,

Yours ſincerely,

J. PRIESTLEY.

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